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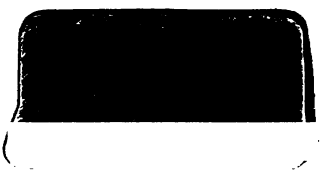

HER FATHER'S NAME.

HER FATHER'S NAME.

A Novel.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "FIGHTING THE AIR," "LOVE'S CONFLICT," ETC.

In Three Volumes.

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Inscribed,

WITH EVERY MARK OF CORDIALITY AND ESTEEM,

TO

MR. AND MRS. W. F. TILLOTSON.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

LEONA IN THE WOODS 1

CHAPTER II.

"YOU ARE IN MY POWER" 29

CHAPTER III.

THE LETTER AND THE RING 59

CHAPTER IV.

THE SNOUT OF PEPITA 87

CHAPTER V.

QUITE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF 114

CHAPTER VI.

LEONA'S STRAIGHT SHOT 141

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE
DONNA ANITA 166

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD" 193

CHAPTER IX.

MR. JOHN ROUSE 220

CHAPTER X.

LEONA'S OATH 247

HER FATHER'S NAME.

CHAPTER I.

LEONA IN THE WOODS.

In the far South—beneath a bright blue sky, surrounded by fruitful valleys and dark green hills—lies Rio de Janeiro.

Before her stretches out the bay, more beautiful in colours and scenery than can be traced by pen and ink, bearing on its bosom the Ilha das Cobras, the Ilha das Euxadas, and further on, Long Island and Paquetà, both shady with the leafy mango and cashew tree, and blossoming with myrtle and the olive-like camarà.

But our destination is beyond all these.

Nestled in the long line of mangrove that skirts the shore beyond Paquetà, or prominently set upon the verdure-covered hills, or sunk, peaceful and retired, amidst the vegetation of the valleys, are to be seen towns and villages, with houses and villas, forts and churches, to attest their presence. Amongst their residents may be found men of all nations and all callings: merchants, farmers, speculators, and perhaps a few retired gentlemen, French, American, or Portuguese, who do not care, in their old age, to leave the spot where they have toiled all their lives, and the country to which they have become naturalised in thought, manner, and feeling.

It is in one of these small outlying towns of the capital of Rio de Janeiro, perhaps the most sequestered and least conspicuous of them all, that the first scenes of this story will be laid. No sky that ever stretched

itself above the heavy atmosphere of our fog-laden and smoky island, even on the brightest and clearest summer morning, could convey the faintest notion of the transparent brilliancy of the hyacinth-tinted firmament that overhung the little town I speak of. White fleecy cloudlets, that seemed to be suspended half-way between earth and heaven, floated over it at intervals to shade the eye from resting too long on such an uninterrupted mass of colour, whilst the softest of summer breezes occasionally stirred the leaves of the tall palms and feathery Brazilian cedars, as though the silence were becoming too oppressive and the trees were whispering to each other.

Noonday had fallen. The town itself—which was composed of detached houses built in the style of villas, kiosks, châlets, and cottages (each tenement standing within a garden of its own, gorgeous with tropical

plants and flowers)—appeared to be asleep. The windows were shaded with green jalousies, the animals had retired to their respective abiding-places; a few field-labourers composed all the life presented by that beautiful sun-lighted picture. But there was a solitude, for those who sought it, within five minutes' walk of the closed portals, and an outdoor life is almost natural to a Brazilian.

The winding road, bordered with plantations and fringed with flowering myrtle hedges, that led from the little town into the country, lured one on with the soft plash and the silvery tinkle of falling water, over a carpet of living green, to where the dense forest clothed the base of the frowning mountains, whose stern uncovered peaks, capped with bare rock, stood out strongly defined against the smiling sky.

Here, as the road lost itself in a narrow path that commenced to wind between tall

trees of pine and palm and cedar, the dazzling sunlight became more bearable, viewed through a delicate tracery of parasites that swung from branch to branch, and interwove their tender tendrils until they formed a curtain for the sight. Further on the trees became a perfect botanical garden, for the air plants that nestled in their forks, the lovely ribbon-like ferns that hung pendant from their branches, and the maiden-hair, or feather-leaf, the orchid, and the mimosa that clustered around their stems. Every now and then appeared a break in the dark forest—a grassy knoll so sheltered by surrounding foliage as to be invisible until you reached it—a kind of natural bower diverging from the general path, of which the walls were formed of waving bamboos and velvety stapelias, the carpet of green and brown mosses, and the seats of every coloured flower.

It is to such a spot, in the very heart

of the forest, outlying the little town I write of, that I wish—in imagination—you would come with me.

* * * * *

To say that the girl who stood on that spot was beautiful, is to say little. There are so many handsome women in the world, and she was connected with a race celebrated for its personal attractions. But she was better than beautiful. She was uncommon-looking. She struck the eye at once, and having struck, she chained it. In the little place where she had been born and bred, she was passed over with the acknowledgment of being the finest woman there, but in any other country her beauty would have been termed remarkable. She was very tall for her sex, five feet seven inches at the least in stature, and her limbs were perfectly moulded in proportion to her height. Her features were large without being masculine; her hair, profusely thick, as

is the case with most women in the Brazils, hung down in rippling waves below her waist. But the first thing about her that struck anyone familiar with the characteristics of her country people as strange, was that her hair, instead of being black, was of a deep chestnut colour, and her eyes a rich brown with yellow lights upon them; eyes of burnished bronze, like none but those of Titian's "Fonarina," or the eyes of a spotted panther in repose. The rest of her appearance did not so much differ from that of other women in the South. She had a dark creamy complexion and skin, under which her warm blood played as it chose. Her mouth was firm and well cut; the lips not full, but scarlet tinted, and upon the upper one the softest, faintest, most delicate down that ever existed on a woman's mouth—the merest shadow of a moustache, that only served to make the lip look more curved and scornful. Yet she was very

young. Although her full firm breasts and rounded limbs and lofty carriage might have led a stranger to suppose she had attained the full term of womanhood, her appearance was due to the clime in which she had been bred, and where she had only numbered seventeen years. Her dress was a strange mixture of European and Spanish fashions, for the modern Brazilians have almost entirely discarded the picturesque costume they retained until the commencement of the present century, although they still preserve some parts of it. She wore a white dress, with a long skirt, and loose hanging sleeves, that displayed her glorious arms whenever she raised them. A bright-hued Mexican scarf tied round her waist held a loaded pistol on one side and a long knife on the other, and her Spanish mantilla of black silk and lace was thrown down on the grass beside her. She was not entirely alone—a large dun-coloured goat with a long black

beard was lying down close to her, chewing the herbs that grew within his reach with evident satisfaction, and blinking his eyes at every fresh burst of energy on his mistress's part (for the girl was speaking), as though he understood all about it, and it was no use trying to stop her until she had done. Hopping about the trunks of the trees, looking for such insects as his soul loved, but never attempting to go out of sight, was her favourite large-beaked, black-and-orange-throated rhamphastos, a bird peculiar to the country, which, though exceedingly timid and difficult to entrap, is most easily tamed by kindness, and makes an excellent and faithful pet. She herself was leaning with one arm on the neck of a dark-coloured mule, bearing an old-fashioned Spanish saddle with trappings, which, although of silver, presented more the appearance of lead from the effects of age, neglect, and ill-usage.

There was no human creature near her, positively none but those three dumb animals to bear her company, and yet the girl was declaiming aloud and vehemently, as though she had an audience to fill the woods.

"Sire!" she said, with one arm extended as to command attention, "this is no time for argument or for delay. Your army has been routed, your towns pillaged, your women and children massacred by the sword! The soldiers are dispirited, the enemy is triumphant—the country begins to lose her faith in you! In this extremity I throw myself into the breach —willing to die, to be martyred, to shed the last drop of my blood for my country, my people, and my king!"

"What do I propose to do, you ask? I propose to lead your army, sire, on to victory, to throw myself into the breach made by your late defeat, to go forward at the head of your troops, and to show these base and cowardly

Englishmen the spirit of a woman of France, that they may begin to fear the men! I will ride into the thick of the battle——"

"On a mule of twelve hands laden with an old Spanish saddle twice his own weight! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared a voice from the surrounding covert.

The girl started, flushed crimson with anger, and had laid her hand upon the pistol in her belt, when the bushes parted to admit a young man, some three or four years her senior, who carried a gun in his hand, and several brace of birds slung in a hunting-bag across his shoulder.

"Bravo, Leona," he exclaimed jestingly, "three cheers for the Maid of Orleans. I've been listening to you for the last half hour. It's as good as a play."

He was a handsome young fellow, dressed in a Panama hat, large top-boots of unbleached leather, and a striped cotton shirt, and he

spoke to the girl in Portuguese. At first she did not answer him.

Her hand had relaxed its hold upon the pistol as soon as she recognised the intruder, but the angry flush had not died out of her countenance, and she beat her foot upon the ground ominously.

"Are you angry that I should have overheard you?" he inquired, presently perceiving her annoyance.

"It is not fair of you, Christobal," she answered. "It is not right that you should steal behind people in this way, and listen to what does not concern you!"

"*Caramba!* Who could have helped hearing? Your voice reached me half a mile away. And why should you mind *my* hearing you, Leona?"

"I do mind it! You make me look like a fool to myself! You have spoilt the pleasure of my day."

"But you were doing it so beautifully. I was admiring every word you said long before I spoke! You appear like a born actress to me! You would make your fortune on the stage."

As he said these words the girl's look of annoyance softened. She had made her goat rise, and taken her bird upon her wrist as though intending to leave the spot, but now she hesitated and placed the rhamphastos on the saddle-bow again.

"Who would believe, to hear you, Leona, that the greater part of your education had been acquired through the newspapers? Of course, I know that your father has taught you much, yet in this solitude, where nothing new seems ever to penetrate, it is marvellous you should know what you do, and be able to speak as you do. It is not knowledge, Leona—it is inspiration! Are you still angry with your Tobal, *urpilla chay?*"

He drew nearer to her and laid his hand on hers. She did not repulse him nor shrink from him; on the contrary, she clasped his hand warmly and frankly, then raised it gratefully to her lips.

"We could not be long angry with each other, Tobalito, if we tried. We, who have grown up together since we were little children. But the newspapers you speak of. I would not exchange them for any books. Books speak of the dead. Newspapers of the living. I do not care what people did a hundred years ago. I want to know what they are doing now—this very day—in Paris and New York, and London, and Madrid. Ah! how I envy you, about to set out on your travels and see the world. Would heaven had made me a man, instead of a stay-at-home, do-nothing woman."

"I do not envy myself, Leona," the young man answered, as he regarded her mournfully.

"I am content to go out into the world, but I leave too much of my heart behind to go happily. It will not be long before I wish myself back again."

"Bah," she replied contemptuously, "what do you leave here compared to what you will find? Your mother; true, she has been an excellent mother, but what did she rear you for except to part with you?"

"There is yourself, Leona."

"I am nothing, Tobal, except your friend, and the world is full of friends like myself, for a good-looking fellow like you. But think what you will see. The great city of New York —with its thousands of citizens, its marts, its stores, its shipping—above all, Tobal, its theatres. Oh! if I had but wings to fly with you there for one day to see the grand play 'Joan of Arc,' as they have placed it on the stage. It must be glorious."

"You might go with me there altogether,

Leona, if you willed it so," said her companion, wistfully. But if she understood his meaning, she did not choose to acknowledge it.

"How thoughtlessly you speak! How could I leave my father?" she answered, shortly, as she threw her mantilla over her head and shoulders, wound the mule's bridle about her arm, and calling to her goat, turned into the forest-path. The young man followed her and walked by her side.

"Is your father no better, Leona?"

"I think not. He seems to me to grow weaker and more apprehensive each day. Oh, Tobal, there is some mystery in my father's life that is killing him by slow degrees."

"A mystery, Leona!"

"Yes. I may say so much to you, may I not? You would not betray him or me? You look upon me as a sister."

He drew himself up proudly.

"I am of Spanish descent, Leona. You

know that I have no Portuguese blood in my veins, and that, though to our misfortune, my family have been banished to these Brazilian wilds, and I have to accept service at the hands of a New York trader to earn my daily bread, I am the lineal descendant of an hidalgo, and have the right to use the title of 'Don' before my name."

"I know it, Tobalito. And you are as proud of your Spanish as I am of my European blood."

"And a Spaniard never betrays his friend, Leona. So that even if I did not regard you as—as—a sister, your father's secret would be safe with me."

"But it is not in my power to tell it you, Tobal. My only knowledge lies in the fact that he has a secret, and that it is connected with the English. How my father hates the English, or the mere mention of them. He would like to forget even that such a nation exists."

"And yet he has taught you to speak English—and speaks it so well himself too."

"Not better than he speaks French and Portuguese."

"Yes, better; because it is so far more difficult a language for a foreigner to acquire. Had it not been for M. Lacoste's instruction, for which I cannot sufficiently thank him, I should never have procured such an appointment as that I have obtained in New York."

"And for which you leave us next week. Is it not so?"

"For which I must leave you (unfortunately for myself) next week. How I wish your father could be persuaded to leave this place and settle in New York also!"

"Ah! that is hopeless, Christobal! I have entreated him again and again to take me out of this wilderness to some more populated district—even to Rio—but he is steadfast in his refusal. He will not even see strangers

when they come here, or make friends with anyone, excepting just the two or three families that he has known for years. Some people attribute this morbid feeling to excessive grief for my mother's death. I do not believe it. That he should lament the loss of a pretty, amiable Brazilian girl, who had been his pleasant companion for a short time, is natural, but not that he should shut himself up from all society for the space of seventeen years. And I can never remember my father different from what he is now, Tobal."

"Neither can I, Leona."

"He always had gray hair from the time I was a little child, and he cannot be fifty yet. And he was always nervous and miserable, and subject to fits of depression and melancholy. Tobalito," continued the girl, drawing closer to him and dropping her voice to a whisper, "I have sometimes even thought that my father was a little—*mad!*"

"No, no, Leona; not that! Don't say that," cried Christobal, hastily.

She had stopped short in the forest-path as she spoke, and was leaning against his shoulder with closed eyes breathing heavily. He turned himself round and folded her in his arms. His frame trembled all over at the contact, but hers remained steadfast as marble. She was thinking only of her father.

"Don't say that—don't think it—my darling," he went on, fervently. "It cannot be so bad as that, Leona. If I thought it were, I *could* not leave you here alone with him. I would sacrifice everything to stop by your side and protect you."

She thanked him by raising her head languidly and kissing him upon the cheek. Then they recommenced their walk homeward as before.

"I have often wished of late that you were not going to leave us, Tobal. I shall

miss my brother greatly. There is another thing I fear, though I cannot tell you why, and that is the intimacy of my poor father with Senor Ribeiro."

"But why should you fear that, Leona? It is but natural they should be intimate. M. Lacoste has, I believe, engaged in several speculations with Ribeiro lately."

"And failed in them, Tobal."

"I am sorry to hear that, because he cannot afford to lose. Is Ribeiro often at your house?"

"Constantly! He is about the only person my father will ever admit. And they remain closeted together for hours at a time."

"In all probability they are discussing some means by which they hope to regain the money they have lost."

"Perhaps so; but I distrust Ribeiro, Tobal. He has an evil eye."

"Does he dare to cast it upon *you?*" exclaimed Don Christobal, fiercely.

"Softly, my brother. There is no need of alarm. The daughter of Louis Lacoste is not for Antonio Ribeiro."

"Who is she for, Leona?" he whispered tenderly.

"For no one at present, Tobalito, except her father and herself. And perhaps—by-and-by—in a distance so far off that she cannot now discern it, for the world; but the saints alone know what lies in the future."

As the girl concluded, she drew from the folds of her sash an embroidered pouch of tobacco, a case of cigarette papers, and a box of allumettes. Then nonchalantly rolling up a cigarette, she lighted and placed it between her lips, as though smoking were the most ordinary thing in the world to her—as, indeed, it was.

Christobal sighed, and continued to walk

by her in silence. He knew from past experience that he had touched a point on which it was useless to try and sound her. Leona's temperament was warm, her disposition luxurious, her body supple as a cat-o'-mountain's; but her heart remained (as far as appearances went) hard as a rock.

* * * * *

Meanwhile a very different sort of scene was being enacted within the walls of the low-roofed, white tenement that owned M. Lacoste as master. There—in a room from which all the sunlight was carefully excluded—dressed in the loosest and most slovenly of Brazilian costumes, with a cigar in his mouth, and that look upon his face of anxious depression and bodily fear which seemed native to it, sat Louis Lacoste.

It was impossible to look at this man without seeing how handsome he had been. Amidst his thick hair and beard—now almost

white from some mysterious cause—could here and there be traced a thread of auburn, to show from whom his daughter had inherited hers. His eyes were brown, his complexion fair, his hands and feet small and slender, in every respect he vastly differed from the companion who sat opposite to him, Senor Antonio Ribeiro. This last-named, a Portuguese of the lowest stamp, was almost repulsive in appearance. It is not generally known, perhaps, that the Brazilian is to the Portuguese what the American is to the English, and that the race becomes much more energetic and refined from mixture with Indian blood. Senor Ribeiro had had no such advantages in his composition. He was of pure Portuguese descent, as might be traced by his large thick nose, the yellow whites to his eyes, and his ungainly hands and feet. Added to this, he was not a day under forty, and had become more obese

than is desirable for the preservation of a graceful carriage. As he lolled back in his chair, keeping his sinister eyes upon the countenance of M. Lacoste, and puffing out clouds of smoke from his thick lips, he looked a very undesirable acquaintance indeed. The conversation had evidently not been of an agreeable nature. Louis Lacoste appeared more than usually anxious, and Senor Ribeiro more than usually unpleasant.

"The failure of that last speculation was entirely due to your carelessness," he said. "If you had gone on board the New York steamer at Rio, as I desired you, and spoken to Joghmann yourself, it would have been all right."

"I told you at the time that I could not go on board the steamer for you," replied M. Lacoste. "The original agreement was that you were to work the Rio speculators and I to attend to the up-country merchants."

"What was your objection to be seen in Rio?" demanded Ribeiro, suspiciously.

"That is my affair," replied his companion; but he looked uneasy. "I am out of health, and I have other business to attend to. Any way it was not part of my contract with you."

"Any way the money's dropped, and must be accounted for. You don't suppose I intend to pay for your swindling," said Ribeiro, coarsely.

"When men agree to speculate together they stand to fall or rise together. I have lost money on the transaction as well as yourself. We must be content to take the thick with the thin."

"But I'm not content to do so, Lacoste. I sunk good money on that speculation, and if it hadn't been for your confounded negligence it would have turned up trumps. I must stand the loss of what I expected to

gain from it—but hang me if I stand the loss of the sum I laid down. It was through your fault it was frittered away, and I look to you to return it me."

"Well! I can't do it; and there's the long and short of it."

"You *must* do it."

"Ribeiro, it's of no use blustering at me, for I haven't got the money."

"Then you must get it."

"And go into debt to pay what I don't owe. I shall do no such thing."

"I'll make you! Do you suppose I'm going to be swindled by a cur like you?"

Lacoste sprung to his feet.

"How dare you apply such a term to me, Ribeiro? You'll have to give me satisfaction for this."

"Give you satisfaction?" laughed the Portuguese. "I'll give you satisfaction by

making the story of your life public to the whole country side, my fine fellow."

"*What do you mean?*"

Lacoste put the question defiantly, but he trembled as he waited for the answer.

"Ah!—What do I mean? Why, just this—that you're moving amongst us under false pretences; that your name is no more Lacoste than it is Ribeiro; that you are no more a Frenchman than you are a Portuguese. I've found you out, my friend. *Your real name is George Evans, and you are an Englishman!*"

CHAPTER II.

"YOU ARE IN MY POWER."

At these words M. Lacoste leant on the back of his chair for support, every nerve of his body quivering with suppressed emotion, whilst Ribeiro retained the seat opposite to him, and kept his evil eye fixed upon his victim, as he continued to puff huge volumes of smoke from between his coarse, defiant lips.

"Who told you this?" Lacoste managed at last to articulate.

"What matters it who told me? Ye know it is the truth! I don't walk about New York, and Boston, and Philadelphia with my eyes shut, or my ears either. The firm

of Evans and Troubridge is as well known in those towns as it is in Liverpool, *nor is the name of Abraham Anson entirely forgotten either,*" added Ribeiro significantly.

The beads of perspiration stood on Lacoste's forehead, but he attempted to brave it out.

"I don't in the least know what you are alluding to," he said, with a sickly smile.

Up to this point, Ribeiro had been coolly insolent, now he became violent.

"Don't you attempt to lie to me," he exclaimed loudly, "or I'll shout the story out from Rio to New York. Once for all, *I know everything*, and can set justice on your track to-morrow if I choose. So if you are wise you will conciliate instead of angering me."

"But it is not true! It was a lie—a calumny. The chain of circumstances by which I was unfortunately surrounded——"

"Does it look like a lie?" interrupts his companion. "For the last twenty years you

have lived in this place under an assumed name and nationality, not using it as others do for an occasional retreat or country residence, but as an habitual home, from which you have refused to stir, even as far as the adjoining towns, and in which you have lived the life of a hermit—or a criminal!—shutting yourself up from all society, and brooding on your evil thoughts, until your hair has turned white with fear! But the time is up for concealment, my friend. You are found out, *Mr. George Evans!*"

The scoffing tone in which the English name dropped from the foreigner's lips seemed to strike his companion with mortal dread. His trembling hands wandered in a nervous manner through the masses of his whitened hair, as though he would make excuses for its appearance.

"The climate," he faltered, "the heat—illness——"

"And the remembrance *of murder!*" continued Ribeiro, finishing the sentence for him.

"No! no! Ribeiro! upon my soul!—by all that is holy—it was a mistake—a false accusation—a——"

"Sit down," said the Portuguese roughly, "and don't make a fool of yourself. I'm here to speak to you on this subject as a friend. Send for brandy—anything you like, that will stop that trembling fit of yours, and make you able to listen to what I have to say."

He sounded a bell that stood upon the table as he spoke, whilst Louis Lacoste dragged himself to, rather than sat down in, the cane chair he had been leaning against. A negress, dressed in a striped blue-and-white cotton dress, with a scarlet and yellow handkerchief tied round her head, answered the summons.

"Here, bring brandy—rum—spirits of

any kind," said Ribeiro, "the master is not well."

The negress returned with what was ordered.

Ribeiro made a strong mixture of brandy and water, and forced it down the throat of Lacoste.

"Drink," he said, "and be a man, if you can. It's lucky for you that you have fallen into such hands as mine."

Lacoste drained the glass, and turned to his tormentor.

"What do you want me to do?" he demanded, in a plaintive voice.

"To look at this matter in a proper light. I know your story. I need say no more to convince you of that. Don't speak," he went on, raising his hand to stop the words which were trembling on M. Lacoste's lips, "for it is useless. If the accusation were a thousand times false, it would make no difference to the

fact. And you know best whether you wish it made public or not!"

"You will ruin me if you make it so," muttered Lacoste.

"Very good! Then we have arrived at the point of the whole matter. *You are in my power.*"

"What can I do to buy myself out of it? You have your price, Ribeiro, like other men. If it is this money you require ——"

"Softly, my friend, softly! We are coming to that presently. The fact I want to establish first is, that you are in my power."

"I am in your power," echoed the unhappy Lacoste, with a look of despair.

"And by merely raising my voice I could bring you—*where?* Eh?" said Ribeiro, with a lengthened intonation that was torture to his listener. "But suppose you put it out of my power! Suppose you unite our in-

terests to that degree that to ruin you is to ruin myself. Suppose——"

"You mean Leona!" interrupted M. Lacoste.

"I mean *Leona!*" repeated Ribeiro, with another sort of light in his evil eyes; "and when I say I mean Leona, I say that I mean to have Leona—or—or—*Mr. George Evans!* Now you know the whole of it." And he assumed another position in his seat, and crossed his legs one over the other, as though the matter were then and there concluded. Louis Lacoste glanced furtively at the ungainly figure—the shock of coarse hair—the greasy complexion—the thick limbs and features—and shuddered—not for himself. But he could not afford to show his feelings on the subject.

"You have always liked Leona," he remarked, aimlessly.

"That is neither here nor there," replied

Ribeiro. "The fact is that I mean to marry her. For the same reason I enter upon no question of ways and means. I am not poor, as you know (though you've done your best to impoverish me with your late folly); but if I were the poorest devil in Rio you could not afford to make an objection to me."

"My daughter is very young," said Lacoste.

"Bah! In a country where the girls marry at fourteen! But were she twelve it would make no difference. She is old enough for me."

"But she will require a little preparation. You would prefer her to go to you of her own accord. Leona is very high-spirited."

"I will soon break her spirit."

"But she has never been coerced in her life. She is my only child," said the poor father, trembling at the prospect presented to him by Ribeiro's words.

"Very good," was the sullen answer. "Keep your only child, but I shall have my substitute."

"No! no! Senor! I did not mean that. Leona is deeply attached to me. She will do anything to which I urge her. But women are fanciful at times, you know; the question of marriage suddenly proposed is apt to have rather a startling effect on a young girl. Still, of course, she is aware it must come some day."

"You will be good enough to make her aware that the day will come very soon—next week at latest."

"Next week!" exclaimed Lacoste.

"*Next week,*" repeated Ribeiro, rising from his chair. "I have business in Rio de Janeiro next week, Mr.—— I mean *Monsieur Lacoste,*" with a mockingly deferential bow, "and I shall wish to take my wife with me in order to keep *temptation out of my way! You* understand."

And with this significant farewell the Portuguese stretched himself, lit a fresh cigar, placed his broad-brimmed straw hat upon his head, and stalked forth into the open air. At the entrance of the garden he encountered Leona and Christobal, who, having completed their homeward stroll, were exchanging a few words in parting. Ribeiro scowled at the young Spaniard, who returned his glance with interest. There was no love lost between the two; nor did Leona look much more pleased than Christobal Valera at the interruption to their interview.

"Good morning, mademoiselle," said Ribeiro, with a leer. "Is it to attend mass that you have left your good father to my company for so many hours?"

"I do not usually take my mule, and my goat, and my bird to mass with me, senor!" she answered indifferently.

"Ah! true. I had overlooked the favourites.

You have been riding, perhaps, then, on the high road?"

"By no means. The high road has no attractions for me in a broiling sun. I have been in the woods."

"And unprotected! M. Lacoste is not as careful of so much beauty as he ought to be, mademoiselle. There are often vagrants passing through the forest. You might come to harm."

"I am never unprotected, Senor Ribeiro," replied Leona, as she placed her hand upon her sash. "I have my pistol and my bowie-knife, and if occasion arose I should know how to use them."

"*Madre de Dios!* I would rather encounter your bowie-knife, mademoiselle, than one flash of your beautiful eyes."

"You would repent your choice, senor. Though I can use them too if I choose," she answered, as she turned them angrily upon

him, and led her mule through the garden into the court at the back of the châlet.

Valera was about to follow her, when Ribeiro stopped him.

"You are not wanted there," he said, rudely; "mademoiselle has business with her father."

"And who gave you the situation of doorkeeper?" retorted Valera, as he pushed past him. "Keep your place, senor, and learn to know where it is."

"Your place is not inside these gates, nor ever shall be," exclaimed Ribeiro, still attempting to block his path.

"What has come to you?" said Christobal, with the purest surprise, as he regarded the other's countenance. "Have you been drinking?"

"It has come to me to tell you plainly that I'll have no half-breed hanging about Mademoiselle Lacoste, and that you've paid

your last visit to this house," retorted the Portuguese.

"Half-breed!" exclaimed Valera, all his Spanish blood rushing into his handsome face at the insult. "Half-breed, you d——d Portuguese, when you know that I would scorn to own the mud that does duty in your veins for blood. *Caramba!* that I should have lived to hear such words from a pig like you. Take that—and that—and that, and learn to know a Don next time you meet him."

So saying, he darted at the obese Ribeiro, and with three well-directed blows that would have done credit to an Englishman, rolled him over on the ground; then quietly straightened himself and followed Leona into the courtyard.

The Portuguese picked himself up from the dust into which he had fallen, recovered his Panama hat, shook out his loose linen trousers, and walked away with a scowl and an oath.

"The first time and the last time," he muttered. "By to-morrow mademoiselle will understand what is before her, and we shall have no more insolence from her or her dog of a Spanish cavalier, or Antonio Ribeiro is very much mistaken—very much mistaken indeed."

* * * * *

Christobal had only followed Leona for the purpose of delivering over her mule to the negro who had the charge of it, which done he was too well aware that it is the custom of the Brazilian ladies to bathe and take a siesta at that hour of the day to intrude upon her presence any longer. Yet he lingered for a moment beneath its creeper-festooned verandah to tell her of his encounter with the Portuguese.

Leona did not smile at the recital; she frowned.

"Had I been there," she said, clasping

the handle of her bowie-knife, "he would not have spoken to you in that manner."

"So I am glad you were not there," laughed her companion. "You are too quick with that knife; you will get into mischief with it some day, Leona."

"Then it will as easily take me out of mischief," she answered coolly. "Would you have me *afraid*, Tobal?"

"I would have you nothing but what you are, Leona—a beautiful panther in female form. But be merciful to the poor mouse you have between your paws, *urpilla chay*."

"A tigress and a turtle," she laughed quietly. "I must be a strange combination, Tobal. *Adios*, brother, until evening. I go to my father and my midday rest."

She moved away from him as she spoke, and he stood watching the undulation of her white robe till it had disappeared. "*Moving*" is the best term by which to express how

Leona walked. There was no light, springy gait about this girl. All her actions were slow and solemn, yet eminently graceful. She reminded one of nothing so much as of that to which Valera had likened her—a panther—a creature all strength and grace and beauty and softness, until it is offended. And even then, though its revenge is quick and its spring fatal, it is still beautiful, perhaps more so in its anger than its play. But when man has at last succeeded in taming one of these apparently untamable creatures, how much more faithful and loving and submissive it becomes than the lesser animal who fawns on everybody.

Leona walked into her father's presence. Lacoste was still sitting where Ribeiro had left him, his hands lying nervelessly upon his knees; his head sunk forward on his breast. At that sight, the finest part of her nature—the woman part—was stirred. She

went up to him, and knelt down by his side. As she did so, her waving chestnut hair fell almost to the ground.

"Father, are you ill—worse—has anything happened to disturb you?"

At the sound of her voice he looked up at her affectionately, imploringly. There was something eminently touching in the contrast between these two—the man so feeble, cowed, and fear-stricken; the woman so strong, energetic, and bold.

"I have had a great, a great *shock*, Leona. I want to speak to you, my child."

"I am here, dear father. Tell me all about it."

She was used to see him indulge in fits, not only of terrible depression, but occasionally of unaccountable fear. She only thought now that some dream, or old recollection, or wayward fancy had arisen to disturb him. She had no conception of real danger.

"I don't want to part with you, Leona," he commenced tremblingly.

"Of course not, father. Neither do I intend ever to part with you. We will cling to each other till death parts us."

"But it may be necessary. Women cannot remain single always. In this country it is a disgrace."

"What do we care for the customs of this country, father? You are French, not Brazilian," she answered proudly.

"But I am not strong, Leona, and death may part us any day; and I could not die happy if I left you without a protector!"

"Without a protector," echoed the girl, "when I have myself, my weapons, and Tobal."

"You do not *love* Christobal, my girl?" demanded Lacoste anxiously.

"I do—dearly! He is the best friend I have, after yourself, father. If Tobal were my brother I could not esteem him more."

"Ah! I did not mean that sort of love, Leona. I meant that love that leads to marriage."

"I love no one in that way," replied his daughter. "I wish to love no one in that way. I have no desire of marriage—no intention of marrying. I have never seen the man to whom I would submit my will, and I never expect to see him."

"But, Leona, whatever your private feelings may be, it is expedient from a public point of view that you should think of marriage. A woman without a husband is thought little of by all nations; in this country she becomes a nonentity—almost a disgrace."

"Then I prefer to be a nonentity and a disgrace."

"But for *my* sake, Leona—to allay my anxiety—to make me happy," he said entreatingly.

The girl rose and stood opposite, looking down upon him. Looking *down* in each sense of the word, for there was contempt in the tone of her answer, though she tried hard not to make it visible.

"How could it increase your happiness to make me miserable, father?"

"How can you be sure it would make you miserable?"

"If I am not sure for myself, no one can be sure for me. I am quite determined, father. I shall never marry. Marriage is slavery, and I was born free. I will never be such a fool as to barter my birthright for any man."

"But I *want* you to marry, Leona," said Lacoste plaintively. "There is a man here, a good man, and a rich man—one who can give you a house in Rio, and a carriage and horses, and every comfort—and one who loves you, Leona, and——"

"Who is he?" she demanded, curiously.

"He is well known and wealthy, my child. You would be envied as his wife, and he would be a friend to me. It is in his power to help me, and——"

"What is his name?" she asked again, in the same tone.

"I know he is not very young, nor perhaps what a girl would call handsome," continued Lacoste, nervous at the prospect of coming to the point, "but he is well known in Rio and New York as a wealthy merchant——"

"*Is it Ribeiro?*"

The question was put in such a tone of complete amazement and disbelief that it was very hard to answer in the affirmative. Her father did so almost more by the action of his head and hand, than by the quavering "yes" that fell from his lips.

"*Ribeiro,*" she repeated, incredulously;

"and you would throw me—me, Leona Lacoste—into the arms of that pig—that beast—that low-bred, money-getting, swindling Portuguese! *Me!* your *child!* whom you profess to love! Father, if this be true, I shall wish I had never been born!"

"No, no, Leona, don't say that."

"I would not live to see the day on which you so prostituted me. I would take this knife and put an end to my existence before it dawned. The crime would be on your head, father, but it would be merciful of me to leave it there. Better your conscience should be heavy with the murder of my body than the murder of my soul."

"Not murder! Leona—not murder! Oh my God, keep me clear of that!" exclaimed the wretched man as he covered up his face in his hands.

"Then why propose a course that would drive me to it? You know what I am—high-

spirited, strong-willed. Afraid of no one—and nothing. Loneliness, poverty, death, have no fears for me; but I will sell myself to no man, above all the world not to that sordid, sensual brute, Ribeiro."

"Say no more, my child, every word you utter goes through me like a sword."

"You will promise never to mention this subject to me again, father?"

"I promise, Leona."

"And you will tell that—that *creature*, who has dared to look at me, what I have said."

"I will tell him."

"And you will command him never to place his foot within these walls again. Ah, I know what you are going to say. We owe him money. Father, we will pay him his money, if I beg in Rio to obtain it; but his presence here would be an insult I could not trust myself not to avenge."

"When he has had his answer he shall not come again!" replied her father in a low voice—low, and so full of despair, that Leona sprung to his side and knelt down as before.

"And you will not hate me, father! You will not be angry with me because I cannot consent to leave you for any other man! Why! what would you do without me? Who could understand all your strange moods and ways, and sympathise with them as I have done? You loved my mother, father! You would not have thrust her from your side against her will. Think that I am she! She only lived with you for eighteen months. I have been your companion since my very birth. Would you part with me more easily than you would have done with her?"

"No, no! child, rest easy! You shall not be the one to go! But if, in years to come, they should ever tell you that your father committed great crimes, don't believe

them, Leona. I have led a thoughtless and a dissipated life, but not a criminal one—not a criminal one!"

"Who should dare to tell me so?" said the girl, with a look of amazement. "But you are not well to-day, dear father! You are going to have one of those strange fits of depression which leave you so weak and exhausted. Will you not lie down? The sun is very high, and a sleep will do you good—Epiphania shall sling your hammock under the trees in the garden, and I will mix you a sherbet and bring it to you there!"

"No! not in the garden—not in the garden!" said Lacoste, with a look of vague alarm, "lest there should be anyone about to see me. But I *will* lie down, Leona. *I will lie down!*"

He rose as he spoke, and she supported him tenderly. She was used to these wild incoherent speeches on her father's part. They

had given birth to some of the misgivings she had communicated to Valera concerning his sanity.

"You will feel better when you have rested," she said soothingly.

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "A long rest! a long rest! But don't believe anything they say against me, Leona. Your father is true; remember that! Foolish—but true!"

"I know he is true," she answered, smiling up into his face.

He took hers between his shaking hands.

"A good face. An honest, brave face. A most beautiful, courageous face. A better face than mine. I am glad Ribeiro will never call it his."

"You may stake your life on that, father," she interposed.

"I will stake my life on that," he murmured. "I will stake my life on that."

She led him carefully to his room, and

saw him laid upon the bed, then, darkening the chamber, brought him a refreshing lemonade.

"You will sleep now, dear father," she said, as she prepared to leave him.

"I shall sleep now," he repeated slowly, "and remember, Leona, that *your father was true!*"

He lifted his eyes wistfully to hers, and she smoothed his hair and kissed his forehead, as though she were soothing a fractious child to rest, then left him to repose.

As she walked away she felt more troubled than usual on his account. If his strange fancies were to take this direction again she might have much difficulty, not only in combating them, but in repelling Ribeiro's insolent advances. At this thought the girl's proud heart began to beat irregularly, and a dark crimson flush stained her olive skin. She called to the negress Epiphania to sling her

net hammock beneath the branches of a wide-spreading cedar tree, and as soon as she had taken her noonday bath she ensconced herself at full length in its narrow folds, and swung lazily to and fro in her leafy bower. The warm, soft air played through her unbound tresses, and lifted the diaphanous drapery that enveloped her supple limbs. From where she lay she could watch the gorgeously-painted butterflies, and the tiny humming birds that revelled in the broad sunlight, darting from flower to flower—now burying themselves in the cups of the fuchsias and lilies, or shaking the slender tendrils of the passion flower, and scattering the perfume of the orange blossoms upon the already too-heavily-laden air. Yet Leona could not charm herself to sleep. Her anger had been too powerfully excited; her pride too suddenly alarmed by her father's proposal, to enable her, all at once, to forget and forgive it, even for him.

Unaccountable as were some of M. Lacoste's words, she had never known him attempt before to make *her* the cat's-paw by which his difficulties were to be solved. And in such a way, too! The bare idea caused her strong nature to shudder, her brave face to pale!

What *could* have happened to make her father entertain the notion of such an awful sacrifice, even for a moment? He must be very largely in Ribeiro's debt before he could contemplate offering his child's honour as the price of his own liberation.

How could this debt have been incurred—and for what? She knew only of the failure of the speculation before alluded to, by which both parties had been losers to some extent, but not an irremediable one.

Leona lay in her hammock, trying to work out this problem for herself, until the warm Brazilian breeze and the lively Brazilian insects fanned and hummed her into repose.

How long she slept she had never occasion afterwards to recall—for she was roused from her siesta by the sound of a piercing scream that rung through the rooms of the little châlet, and penetrated the recesses of her leafy bower, recalling her to the affairs of life with a sense of terror.

CHAPTER III.

THE LETTER AND THE RING.

HER *father!* That was her first thought. She sprang from her hammock with the agility of a cat, and rushed into the châlet. On the threshold of the door she encountered the negress Epiphania, wringing her hands and screaming.

"Oh, come to the master, missy! Come to the master. He very sick indeed."

She walked past her hurriedly into his chamber. One glance was sufficient. Her father was either dying—or dead.

"Go and fetch Dr. Linton," she exclaimed, mentioning an old English surgeon and naturalist, who had been staying for some

months in their town, and lived within a few yards of them.

In a few minutes he was by her side.

"Oh, Dr. Linton!" she cried, "what does all this mean? What has he been doing to himself? Why is there such a smell of almonds in the room?"

M. Lacoste was lying on his bed, apparently as his daughter had left him, but his face had turned livid, his nails were blue, and his fingers clenched together. His eyes were wide open, prominent and glistening, which had led Leona to believe he was in a fit, and about his closed mouth was to be seen a ring of foam. Dr. Linton examined the eyeballs, laid his hand upon the heart, and then looked compassionately at the girl kneeling beside the corpse.

"Is it a fit, Dr. Linton? Should he have a warm bath?"

"It is not a fit, mademoiselle."

"What then? Has he gone mad? Oh doctor, don't say that! I have feared it for so long."

"You have no need to fear it; but try and gather up your courage to meet a great shock. Your poor father is dead."

"*Dead!* and in a moment. But how came he dead? What has killed him?"

"I am afraid *this* has," replied the doctor, as he disengaged a small phial from the stiffened grasp.

"*That! What is that?*" demanded Leona, trembling.

"It is poison, mademoiselle. This bottle has contained prussic acid."

"And you mean that he killed himself with it—that my father committed suicide? That he has left me to go through the world alone."

"Hush! hush! mademoiselle, be calm, be quieted. Do not faint, I implore you."

"I shall not faint, doctor, I have too much European blood in me for that. But this—I *cannot, cannot* believe it. Oh! will you not try something before you give up all hope. Are there no remedies, no medicines, nothing that might yet save him?"

"My dear young lady, he has been dead for the last two hours! I know it must be hard of belief, but nothing will ever recall your poor father to this world again."

"He might have waited," said the girl, in a plaintive voice; "he might have struggled on a little longer for my sake. Was I not here to share his burdens? Why did he not confide in me?"

"He was probably not in a state of mind to understand the depth of your affection. Tell me, mademoiselle, have you had any reason to suppose lately that M. Lacoste contemplated such an act as this?"

"None whatever—at least not more than usual."

"Was he commonly depressed in spirits, then?"

"Very much so at times, and he has often said he wished that he were dead. But I thought little of it. My father's life has not been a happy one."

"Has M. Lacoste had any fresh trouble lately that would have been likely to upset his mind?"

"He experienced some money losses, but I do not think they were heavy."

"And nothing has occurred, to-day or yesterday, for instance, to make you suspect he suffered more than ordinary?"

"Nothing except—Oh Holy Virgin! it could not have been that."

"To what do you allude, mademoiselle?"

"Only a conversation he and I held a few hours since, in which my father urged me on a course I much objected to. He seemed wounded at my refusal, but he said nothing—nothing—to make me think—to

make me fear——" But here Leona's narrative broke down in a violent fit of weeping.

"Be comforted, mademoiselle, and rest assured that no ordinary disappointment drove your poor father to this rash act. I have observed much peculiarity about him myself, and have little doubt that the seeds of the insanity that took possession of him at the last were sown years and years ago. And now, what can I do for you in this sad extremity?"

"Nothing, doctor, but leave me alone with him."

"But that is not fit for a girl of your years."

"We have been always alone since I can remember, and I wish to share my last duty to him with no one. I must have time to think about it. He was the only thing I loved on earth. I cannot believe all at once —that *he is gone!*"

"Think, dear mademoiselle. Is there no one you would wish to see. No friend——"

"I have no friends! Stay, though, there is Tobal. Yes! Tell Don Christobal Valera that my father is *dead*, and that I want him to come and weep with me."

She turned all her attention then to the corpse, and Doctor Linton, wondering at the fortitude and composure she displayed, left her alone with the body of her father.

He would not have thought so much of her fortitude and composure could he have seen her *when* she was alone. Her first grief was manifested in a wild unchastened cry of despair; but it exhausted itself, as such outbursts will, and then she became quiet and resigned, and dispensed the various orders that were necessary with all a woman's firmness and decision.

In the Brazils (as in all southern climates) interment is conducted as soon as possible

after death, and by the same evening poor Lacoste's body, decked with all manner of flowers by his daughter's loving hands, was lying in its coffin, ready for removal at the following sunrise. Her friend Christobal had been of the greatest use to Leona at this juncture, taking all the business part of the matter off her hands; but when the evening fell, and the preparations for the morning were complete, her sick heart wearied even of his sympathy, and she prayed him to leave her once more alone with her sorrow.

So she sat, poor child, taking no heed of the gathering gloom, beside the bed on which her father's coffin rested, with her tired head laid upon the pillows.

Suddenly a shadow darkened the open doorway. She looked up languidly; it was that of Ribeiro. In a moment Leona was on her feet.

"What do you do here, senor?" she demanded coldly.

The Portuguese bowed deferentially.

"I come—after a friend's custom—to offer my sincere sympathy to mademoiselle in the loss she has sustained, and to take a last look at the features of my poor comrade Lacoste."

"You shall not touch him! You shall not even see him!" exclaimed Leona, as she threw a white covering over the face of the corpse. "Your presence here, senor, is an intrusion and an insult, and I command you to leave the house!"

"Gently, gently, mademoiselle," said Ribeiro, "such words are hardly seemly in the presence of the dead."

"In the presence of the dead whom you drove to his death by your diabolical demands!" exclaimed the girl with excitement. "I tell you, senor, that if you were to attempt to touch my father's body with your treacherous hands, it would rise up from its coffin and confront you!"

"*Sacristi!* A modern miracle! I should like to see it performed, mademoiselle. Permit me at least to try my power."

"If you come a step nearer I will run you through the heart!" exclaimed Leona passionately, as she drew her knife.

Ribeiro stepped backward.

"Come, come, mademoiselle, one murder is enough in a day, surely. But I admire your spirit. You inherit it, doubtless, from your father. You are what the English people call 'a chip off the old block.'"

"If my poor father had possessed one half my spirit he would never have had any dealings with such a man as you."

"Better and better. I like a woman who can speak her mind. But your father had clearer views than yourself, mademoiselle. He desired me for a son-in-law."

"It is a lie."

"Your retort is impolite, mademoiselle.

It is also untrue. M. Lacoste not only looked on my proposal with favour, but also promised me your hand in marriage."

"I do not believe it; but if he did you must have used some more powerful persuasion than you possess with me."

"Your father's name, perhaps, is of no value to you."

"My father's name, senor, is everything to me. That is one reason why I would never sink it in yours. I will live to guard his name—as he left it me—intact."

"Ha, ha! And you do not even know it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that your father's name was not Lacoste—that he was a criminal—in hiding here—under an assumed name. That I discovered his secret, and, under the fear of exposure, as the price of secrecy, he promised me his daughter's hand in marriage."

"It is false—as false as yourself! You

are trumping up these base stories now in order to force me to yield to your wishes. But I will die first, and so I told my dear father."

"You told him you would not marry me? Mademoiselle, *his death lies at your door!*"

At these words Leona stared Ribeiro in the face, unable either to deny them or expostulate with him.

"Listen, mademoiselle!" said the Portuguese, advancing a step nearer and lowering his voice; "I love you, and by fair means or foul I intend to have you! Your father there was an Englishman—by name George Evans—and he fled from his native country *to escape the gallows!*"

"*What?*"

"He committed a murder, but before the officers of justice could secure him he had escaped to America, and hid himself in the Brazils. *This* was the reason of his false

name, his false nationality, his studied seclusion, his fear of his fellow-men. He was afraid of recognition, detection, arrest! His conscience was his gaoler, and to avoid a public execution he had to live in solitary confinement. Now you know your father's story, Leona Evans."

With the swiftness of lightning her thoughts had darted over the past years, recalling all her poor father's fits of melancholy and fear, and her heart felt like a stone in her bosom at the thought of all he must have suffered. But her indignation was reserved for him who had exposed the dead.

"And *you* dared to make use of this knowledge as a means of frightening him into submission. *You* threatened to expose his misfortune, and claimed his only comfort, his daughter, as the price of secrecy?"

"I did, mademoiselle! More, *I do*. Exposure can no longer harm the poor creature lying there, but it can injure his good name,

and through his good name it will injure you. But, as my wife, mademoiselle——"

"*Your wife!*" she repeated, in accents of the bitterest contempt. "*Your wife!* you base, lying, cowardly Portuguese! I would sooner be the wife of my negro helper! *Your wife!* I will never touch your hand again, unless it be in order to come close enough to you to kill you. I do not believe one word of what you have said. Your story is a fabrication from beginning to end. My father was an honest, honourable gentleman, too good to tread the same ground as a cur like yourself. But if it were true, a thousand times over, I would still say '*Do your worst!*' I shall never be any nearer to you than I am now, when I tell you that I hate, and loathe, and despise you as the meanest creature that crawls upon God's earth."

Her look of scorn was unmistakable. She gathered up her skirts as though she feared

they might come in contact with him, and stood gazing down upon him—fearless and defiant—like some grand pythoness of old.

Ribeiro shrunk before her eyes. He knew, to all intents and purposes, that his threats had become harmless. They could no longer hurt the poor unconscious figure lying in the coffin—and if they could not control the daughter's sense of shame in the horror of exposure, they were impotent. Still he could wound her, and he let fly a poisoned shaft as he withdrew.

"Very good, mademoiselle—your compliments shall not be forgotten! At the same time allow me to observe that it is by your obstinacy your father's life has been sacrificed. This morning he offered me his daughter's hand as the price of preserving my faith with him. This afternoon you refuse at any costs to fulfil his contract—you tell him you will die first. Your poor father—with exposure on the

one hand, and your unhappiness on the other —prefers death, and so extricates himself from the dilemma. Your father's death is on your head, mademoiselle. I wish you joy of the reflection. Adieu."

And so Ribeiro left her, with her father's silent, unreproachful body, and her own sad thoughts.

* * * * *

Night, which falls so suddenly in the climates where twilight is unknown, gathered about her. Large dusky moths began to flop against her forehead in the darkness; and bats, with maize-lined breasts and wings, chased each other round the room in eddying circles uttering shrill cries as they went; still she sat there alone, silent, absorbed, like a figure carved in stone. The scent of the lotus and the neighbouring datura, exhaled by the evening dews, began to make itself perceptible; a sensation of cold and fear passed over Leona;

she glanced around the dark room shudderingly, and yet felt as if she had no strength or energy to rise. The dreadful story she had heard had struck on her heart like ice. She did not, could not believe it; but she knew Ribeiro's malicious, revengeful temper, and that he would stop at nothing to punish her for the disappointment she had caused him. Her kind, gentle, amiable father, whom—for all his learning and superiority to herself—she had cherished as a child for so many years past, a *murderer!*

It was impossible! She knew it to be a falsehood; yet that his name should have been so cruelly traduced, his weak fears for his own safety worked upon—and by reason of her decision—pierced her inmost soul.

She was too sensible and clear-minded to fall to lamenting the course her actions had taken, because the event had proved contrary to her expectations. She knew that in refusing

to marry Ribeiro she had followed the instincts of her better nature, and refused to commit a crime. She felt that could she by such an act even then raise her father in health and strength from the coffin where he lay, it would be impossible to her still. She could only weep silently over the weakness of which the dead man had been guilty, and wonder what there had been defective in her conduct towards him that he had never confided to her the fear under which he laboured. For though she rejected with scorn the idea of his guilt, she felt that his failing mind must have been burdened with a sense of great terror before it could have broken down so utterly as it had done. If he had but told her of Ribeiro's threats and presumptuous demands, she would have defied the one and repelled the other till she had exposed the craven through the land. Why could not her poor father have trusted to her—his own child—the

nearest relation he possessed, to fight his battle for him and clear his name from all undeserved blame? As Leona thought thus, it struck her that amongst M. Lacoste's papers might be found something to throw a light upon the mystery of his life and death. There was one small deed-box which he had always kept in his own room and forbidden her to touch. Once—many years ago—she had found him burning some papers out of this box, and he had spoken sharply to her because she had picked up part of one before it was wholly consumed as though with the intention of examining it.

Leona would never have dreamed of disobeying her father during his lifetime, but she felt now that she owed a higher duty to the dead than to the living.

His secrets—if he had any—were safe with her, but if it lay within the range of possibility she must have wherewithal to re-

fute the cruel slander that Ribeiro had cast upon his name, and which he had threatened to make public property. With this end in view the girl dragged herself slowly up from her recumbent posture, and calling to the negro servants, Epiphania and Daniel, to bring lights into the chamber and close the jalousies of the windows, she set herself to her appointed task. The box—an ordinary deed-case with a Bramah lock—was not difficult to find. It stood in the usual position in M. Lacoste's wardrobe, but for the key that fitted it Leona searched long in vain. It was not in his desk, nor with his other keys, nor in any of his private drawers. At last, as she was feeling for it over each separate vestment he had been in the habit of wearing, she suddenly came across something hard in the lining of a coat. In another moment she had ripped it open, and there lay the missing key, enveloped in several folds of cotton.

The discovery made her turn sick and cold. The evident desire of secrecy smote her with a sudden fear, for which she bitterly reproached herself. Why should not her father have used caution and secrecy — like all prudent men—in the conduct of his private affairs? What greater need of them than the fact of his being in the daily company of an unscrupulous scoundrel like Antonio Ribeiro, whose character perhaps he knew more of than his daughter had ever suspected? She carried the deed-box to a table, and opened it beneath the lamp-light. It contained a tray with a small partition closed with a sliding lid. Leona's curiosity led her first to examine this. Within were several layers of cotton wool, beneath them a small phial, carefully stoppered and tied down, and labelled "Hydrocyanic Acid." It was the exact counterpart of the one Dr. Linton had disengaged from her dead father's hand and carried away with

him. There was little doubt of one thing then. He had foreseen the crisis which might arise, and provided against it. The daughter's heart stood still with the terrible doubt this fact excited. She replaced the sliding lid quickly, and turned with a shudder to the examination of the rest of the contents of the deed-box. They consisted chiefly of papers. The first packet she took up was labelled, "*Maraquita's letters. To be given to my daughter Leona, or burned, after my death.*" These were a few love-letters that had passed between her pretty girlish mother and himself before their marriage, or during the brief periods of their separation afterwards. Maraquita had only been a wife for eighteen months when a sharp fever carried her out of this world. Her daughter, who, happily for the preservation of her filial respect, had been spared a knowledge of her weak, indolent, exacting southern nature, still cherished the

memory of an ideal mother—beautiful, loving, and faithful to her father and herself—and the large tears gathered in her eyes and coursed slowly down her cheeks as she contemplated this frail memento of her brief happiness.

"Poor mother!" she whispered softly, "poor, young, pretty mother! It is as well you left him when you did, for this would surely have broken your heart—unless, indeed, your love had succeeded, where mine has failed, in making him courageous enough to brave the world, and slander, and all things, for the truth's sake."

She raised the faded writing to her lips, and laid the packet on one side to examine at her leisure. She did not expect to find anything in it to aid her search, which appeared destined to be fruitless. Old receipts, cuttings from newspapers, schemes for speculations (by means of which, and the little knowledge he had of trade, M. Lacoste and she had

chiefly lived), made up the bulk of the contents of the deed-box.

She could not find a line to throw any light on her father's life before he came to the Brazils; not a word of France or the Lacoste family. If he at any time had preserved such records, he must have destroyed them with the papers she saw him burn. There was a little money at the bottom of the box, a roll of Brazilian notes, amounting, according to English valuation, to about fifty pounds; and a solitary piece of jewellery, a man's signet-ring, which Leona did not remember to have seen before. It was formed of a cornelian, without inscription, and set in the plainest gold. Inside it were engraved, as though they had been scratched with some sharp instrument, the two letters, "A. A." Leona regarded them curiously, but indifferently. They conveyed no meaning to her mind. But the ornament pleased her as a memento of her father, and she placed it on her finger. The deed-

box, then, contained nothing after all—except that dread witness of the fear by which his sorrowful life had been ended. As she thought of it the girl's strong heart became a well of compassion. She would have liked to kill the man who had driven her father to his death.

"Poor sorrowful spirit!" she exclaimed, as she rose and stood by the coffin; "how you have been startled from your shelter. You were too weak to feel capable of coping with a false accusation that should embroil my good name with yours. Your brain gave way under the impossibility of clearing yourself. You were without friends or family in this country —without money to return to your home. How could you prove to the world that you were really Louis Lacoste, and that this foul charge brought against you was a lie?

"How can I prove it, who would die to clear your memory from such a stain? This man may spread the tale all over Rio, and I can but sit still and deny it.

"But I will live to see your honour cleared, father. I cannot think of any means at present. The way is all dark and uncertain before me. But one thing is sure, that you are innocent, and that I, Leona Lacoste, will live among these people, whom Ribeiro will teach to blame you, until by God's help I have proved you so."

She said the words slowly and solemnly, as if she were taking an oath before high heaven, and as she concluded them she stooped and kissed the dead man's forehead. Then drawing the lamp nearer, she sat down again beside the coffin and proceeded to examine her mother's love-letters. It was the fittest spot, she thought, on which to read them.

"They are together now," said Leona to herself as she untied the packet, "and she is comforting him, perhaps, for all he has gone through. She at least knows his innocence and his suffering. And for the rest—what does it matter? The truth will out."

She read the silly little letters—written in bad Portuguese and worse grammar—one after another, almost without comprehending them, so preoccupied was her mind with the graver matter. But presently, folded inside one of them—evidently left there by accident—she came upon a very different sort of production, written in English, and by a man's straggling hand. It has already been said that Leona Lacoste understood the English language. Her father, who was an accomplished linguist, had taught her both to read and speak it. She had no difficulty, therefore, in comprehending the document that had slipped amongst Maraquita's love-letters.

As she perused it her face grew more and more pale; her eyes seemed to start from her head, as though fascinated by the words they saw; her whole body trembled and swayed backward and forward on her seat. Presently she rose, and looking round the room as if she

feared there were spectators to her action, snatched the signet-ring off her finger again, rolled it tightly up in the letter she had been perusing, and thrust it down her bosom. Then she began to walk up and down the room, as though inertion were impossible to her, whilst she tried to think what was best to be done. Once she paused, and, going up to the coffin, took the ring and letter from her bosom and placed them carefully in the folds of the shroud; but on further reflection she drew them forth again and replaced them in their former hiding-place.

"What shall I do—what shall I do?" she wailed above the corpse. "I am sure you *never*, never did that of which he accuses you; but how can I deny it with *this* in my bosom? And I cannot stay to hear your name traduced and vilified and yet remain silent. Oh! what *shall* I do—what *shall* I do?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SNOUT OF PEPITA.

It was still early morning on the following day when Christobal Valera returned from having seen the body of his friend M. Lacoste lowered into the grave. There had been some little difficulty about the interment. Poor Lacoste had never professed to belong to any religion. It was commonly supposed in the town that he was a free-thinker, and that he had committed suicide was an indisputable fact.

Under these circumstances his corpse was refused burial in consecrated ground; and Valera had taken great trouble to conceal the truth from his daughter. It was certain that

sooner or later she must hear it, but he trusted the knowledge would not be so painful when her first grief had abated. Leona therefore sat at home in ignorance of all, save that they had taken her father's body from her, whilst Christobal, with a few other friends, saw the coffin placed in a grave dug on the outskirts of the fence which surrounded the burial-ground. And then he walked slowly back to the little châlet, in hopes of comforting poor solitary Leona.

As he entered the house he could trace the signs of her abandonment everywhere. Epiphania had prepared the breakfast as usual. The chocolate was ready and the table was spread; but the only moving object in the sitting-room was the orange-throated rhamphastos, who was hopping about the matted floor, picking up such insects as were foolish enough to be caught, and uttering his shrill cry of "*tucano! tucano!*" at each fresh

capture. Leona's guitar, with its broad blue ribbon, was lying on the ground. The flowers were faded and dying in the vases. A little snow-white Cuba terrier, called "Pepita," which was considered her especial favourite, looked up from the couch and whined as Valera appeared. This change was more remarkable in the home of Leona than it would have been in that of any other woman, for her indomitable spirit, her independent bearing, and free, reckless manners seemed to make anything like desolation or despondency an anomaly to her. Yet when, after Christobal had called her by name three or four times, she appeared before him, he was fain to confess that the alteration in herself was much greater than in her surroundings. Her rippling hair was hanging over her shoulders in a tangled mass, her fiery, golden-brown eyes had become dull and heavy, her proud lip uncurled and drooping. She was but a crushed, sodden

likeness of the bold, animated woman who had walked by his side through the forest but yesterday.

"Is it over?" she demanded, in a low voice.

"It is over, dear Leona, and I have come to see what I can do for you."

"You can do nothing for me, Tobal."

"That is not a kind answer, *m'amie*. The shock you have received is a terrible one. No one knows the weight of it better than myself. But you live still, Leona, and whilst you live, I must care for you. Is it not so?"

"Do you care for me very much, Tobal?" she said suddenly, as she placed her hand upon his arm. "More than anything else?"

The young Spaniard's face flushed crimson.

"*Very, very* much," he answered fervently. "More than for my own life, Leona."

"Then take me with you when you go away from here, Tobal. Take me with you

to New York. Don't let me stay in this place any longer."

"Will you go?" he cried joyfully.

"Oh, I long to go. I am panting to leave this town behind me. I feel as if I could never breathe in this air again. It chokes me."

"Leona, I should never have dared to propose this to you so soon. But you know it has been in my thoughts for years. The time is short, my dearest; but if you are willing, it cannot be too short for me. I am to start from Rio next week, and we might be married——"

"Married!" echoed the girl sharply. "Who spoke of marriage?"

"Why yourself, Leona. Did you not ask me to take you with me to New York? Don't say you have repented of your goodness already."

"I did ask you. I ask you again. I must leave this place, and I want to travel to

New York with you—but married, Tobal? Oh no; I shall never be married."

"But how am I, then, to take you with me, Leona?"

"As you would take anyone else. As you would take me if I were your sister in reality, and not only in name."

"But you are not my sister."

"What difference does that make?"

"None to us; but every difference in the eyes of the world. You would lose your good name, your reputation——"

"I do not care for my reputation."

"But I do—a thousand times more than for my own."

"You refuse to take me, then?"

"I *must not* take you, *m'amie*, under these circumstances."

"Then I shall go alone."

"You cannot do that, Leona," said Valera hastily. "You cannot travel by yourself

such a distance. So ignorant as you are of journeying, and so—so—good-looking. All manner of harm might happen to you by the way."

"*Madre purissima!* Am I not able to protect myself? No harm will come to me but of my own free will. But it must be free. I will shackle it with that of no man. Christobal, if you love me, as you say you do, you will never mention the subject of marriage to me again. I hate—despise it."

"Why are you so anxious to leave your home, Leona?" asked the young man, without taking notice of her last remark.

"*My home!* Where is my home? I have none, *without him.* I told you yesterday, Tobal, that I belonged only to my father and myself, and perhaps at some future period—to the world. I little thought then how soon the world would claim me. But to-day I am all alone; I owe duty to no one, and I must go forth and make money for myself."

"How, Leona?"

"On the stage! I mean to be an actress, Tobal."

"But without friends or interest — a stranger in New York—how could you accomplish your design? It requires an education to take up such a profession. You must be trained for it."

"I intend to be trained!"

"And then it is replete with danger to a woman — replete with temptation, with scandal."

"Bah! how timid you men are! Am I not to live? and how can I live unless I work for my support. I could have travelled with you to New York, but you refuse to take me. Good! then I must look after myself. But my mind's made up. I am going on the stage."

"You will want money for such an undertaking."

"I have money; and I shall dispose of

this house and furniture that belonged to my father. Tobal, do not try to shake my resolution," she added in a lower and more hurried voice, "for I cannot stay here any longer. It is too painful to me, and—and"—looking round her nervously—"*I am afraid.*"

"Afraid, Leona! I thought you were never afraid of anything!"

"No!—not of things—but people! I fear Ribeiro! I doubt his friendship to my father—or for me! I dislike him, and he knows it; and I could not live here, all by myself, subject to anything he might do—or—or—*say.*"

"Of course you cannot, Leona, and that is what I came to speak to you about this morning. You cannot continue to live in the châlet alone, it would not be right or safe; but you have known my mother since you were a little child, and when I am gone she will be lonely too. Why not go and live with her, *m'amie,* or let her come and live with you here?"

"Dona Josefa has always been kind to me," said Leona, "but I cannot accept charity from anyone."

"It would not be charity. You would be under no obligation to her, for here she would live rent-free, which would more than cover the expense of keeping you. And the commandant and padre both think it would be the very best thing that you could do."

"You have spoken to them about it?" inquired the girl, with a look of displeasure.

"I have been so anxious about your future," he replied, "particularly as I have to leave you so soon myself. And my mother is quite prepared either to receive you or come here."

"I shall not remain in this place," said Leona, determinedly.

"Neither Ribeiro nor any other scoundrel shall molest you whilst under my mother's protection," continued Valera, earnestly. "Say

that you will consent to it, Leona, at least, for the present, and then when I get to New York I will make all the inquiries that are needful, and let you know what chance there is of your succeeding in the project upon which you are bent. I am forced to go to Rio this afternoon, to make some final arrangements for my journey, and you will make me so much happier if you promise that you will remain with my mother before I go."

"You are going to Rio this afternoon?" she said inquisitively.

"Yes, but only for a few days, and I shall return here to bid you farewell. Be kind, Leona, and set my heart at rest before I start, else——"

"Else what?"

"I must send my mother and the padre to talk you into consenting to our plans."

"No, no! You shall send no one here, Tobal. I am not well enough! I will not

see them! But listen; I will think over what you have said to me, and when you return from Rio you shall have my answer. Will that content you, Tobalito?"

The caressing diminutive charmed her listener.

"A thousand thanks, *m'amie*," he exclaimed, as he kissed her hand. Leona calmly raised her head and kissed him in return upon the cheek.

"Thou art a good brother, and I love thee!" she said in his own language; but neither the action nor the words brought the least access of colour to her pale face. "And now leave me, Tobal, for my heart is very heavy, and I am in need of rest. But come for your answer as soon as you return from Rio."

Valera left her, full of hopeful anticipation. He thought in her last words that he heard signs of her relenting—not towards living with his mother, Dona Josefa—but himself. For

he knew how Leona's independent spirit would chafe at any coercion on the part of another woman, and how eagerly she had always desired to step outside the proscribed and narrow limits of her native town. And if marriage could be made the watchword of liberty instead of bondage in her eyes, she would consent to be married.

He loved her very dearly, but he knew her very little. He loved her so passionately, with all the strength and fire of his Spanish breeding, that he had given up all other women for her sake, and had no thought or desire for anyone but Leona Lacoste.

And this fervent attachment, which had grown up with him from childhood, the girl had considerably fanned by her complete indifference to every phase of it excepting the innocent childish part. Her Tobalito was her brother, and her playmate, and her friend, and she kissed and caressed him with a freedom

that very often nearly drove the young man crazy, whilst if he presumed on her familiarities to speak of a warmer love than her own, she ridiculed, or blamed, or grew angry with him. Still Valera could not help hoping that the day might dawn when Leona would discover that he had become necessary to her, and he dreaded her going out into the world of New York and assuming a position that would bring her uncommon beauty into prominence, and subject it to the admiration of the crowd. He was selfish—like most lovers—and wanted to keep others from even looking at the treasure he had found, and it was with that idea he had proposed that the girl should remain behind in the place she hated under the protection of his stupid old mother, Dona Josefa, who had no ideas in her head beyond garlic and decorum—garlic in her own dishes and decorum in the conduct of her friends. Valera had in fact—especially by mentioning the matter to the

commandant and padre—attempted to assume a certain amount of coercion with Leona, which she resented far more strongly than she had shown. Of this, however, he was happily unaware, and, during his compulsory stay in Rio, was wondering what her answer to him would be; and flattering himself that, horrified at the idea of further seclusion, and longing to travel to New York under his protection, Leona would throw herself into his arms and say, "Do what you will, my Tobalito, so you take me away with you." Under this pleasing delusion he hurried over his business in Rio, and flew back to his home, where the first question he put to his mother was whether she had seen Leona.

"Seen her!" exclaimed Dona Josefa, whom he had disturbed in the discussion of a mess of meat and garlic which scented the whole house, "I should like to know who *has* seen her—*she's gone!*"

"Gone! Where?"

"The saints preserve us! How can I tell you *where?* The girl has left the châlet and the town. Epiphania came crying to me with the news two days after she went, that's yesterday. They thought nothing of her absence the first day, she's always been so strange in her manners; but when it came to staying two nights from home, they began to think it extraordinary, even for Mademoiselle Leona."

"But has no one followed or looked for her?" demanded Valera, excitedly.

"Great heaven! Do you suppose an old woman like myself can go running after every headstrong, ill-mannered girl that chooses to leave her home, or that the commandant or the police have time to do it? Who knows even if she went alone."

"Mother, you shall not hint at such a thing, even to me. Heavens! to think that it should have happened and I not here. If grief should have driven her to destroy herself!"

"Bah, Leona is not the girl to cure grief after that fashion, Christobal. She has always been too wilful and independent for a woman. In Spain such conduct would not be tolerated. She would have lost her reputation, her character, her good name," replied Dona Josefa, reapplying herself to the garlic-flavoured mess.

"No lady in Spain, even the very highest, and most carefully guarded, could be purer or more modest than Leona," said Don Christobal, proudly.

"And you call it modest to run away from home within a few days of her father's shameful death, and without leaving a word or sign by which she may be traced or followed!"

"Is it possible that the servants know nothing on the subject?"

"You had better question them yourself. To me they are silent as the grave."

"I will question them at once," cried the

young man, as he seized his hat and left the house.

The châlet looked still more desolate than it had done on the occasion of his last visit there. The potted basil, pinks, geraniums, lavender, and sweetherbs, in which all the Brazilian women take so much delight, and which in troughs raised above the reach of the poultry ornamented the front of the house, were drooping for want of water. The little white bantams and guinea fowls, the pigeons and the doves, that had been Leona's care, flocked round him as he passed through the court-yard, as though asking for her; and Epiphania, seated in the blinding sun on the steps of the verandah with her hands folded, was as speaking a sign as any of the double misfortune that had fallen on the household.

"Have you seen the mistress?" she cried, starting into life as Valera appeared.

"No, Epiphania; I wish I had. I have

only just returned from Rio, and received the news; and I have come to hear all you can tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell, sar. On the day poor master was buried the mistress was very sad, and that night she never went to bed, for Daniel and I watched her walking about the room through the jalousies. The next morning she went out riding on her mule, and she never came back again. No word—no news—nothing. All dark—all miserable. Daniel and I cry all day for poor mistress."

"But what has become of the mule?"

"Don't know, sar. Gone with the mistress, I suppose. Mule never came back either."

"But have you searched the house? She must have left a letter, or something, to say where she has gone."

"Daniel and I not look at anything, sar. Know our duty better. Leave that for padre or you to do."

At this information Valera rushed past the woman into the house, but everything was in its usual place. Leona apparently had taken nothing with her. Even the white dress he had last seen her wear was thrown across the bed, as if it had just been taken off.

But presently his eye caught sight of a volume laid conspicuously upon her toilet-table. It was a copy of "Don Quixote," a present from himself to her, and which was generally kept in the sitting-room. In a moment he had opened it. On the flyleaf was written:

"Sell the house and furniture, Tobal; and keep the proceeds till we meet again. You will find the necessary authority in the deed-box, in a letter addressed from my father to me. Do this before you start on your journey —for Leona."

That was all. Not a hint of where she was going, or why she went, or when he might

expect again to meet her. He might guess at her intentions or her wishes from the last conversation he had held with her, but he had no proof of them. And meanwhile she had imposed a certain duty on him, which inferred she had no design of returning to her home.

"Did Mademoiselle Leona neither see nor speak with anyone before her departure except myself? Did not the padre or the commandant call to see her?" he demanded of Epiphania, thinking perhaps that one or other of those worthies had irritated the girl into leaving home.

"No, sar. Padre not come, commandant not come. Senor Ribeiro, *he* came the same evening and talked a good deal with the mistress — talked very comfortable in loud voice, but it didn't seem to do her any good."

"Ribeiro has been here, has he?"

"For a little time, sar—not long. Mistress

called Daniel to bring his mule round, and then the senor went away again."

"*Caramba!* that he should have dared! Well, Epiphania, your mistress is not coming here again."

"Ah! Hoo!—the bad news. And where is mistress going to live, sar! And what is to become of Daniel and me, and the poor animals, and the house, and everything?"

"I will look after all that. You and Daniel must remain quietly here for a few days, and I will see that you are provided for. The animals will be sold, except Pepita. Where is she?"

"Oh, she went with the mistress, sar. The last thing I saw was Pepita's face under the mistress's mantilla."

"And the bird?"

"He's moping on the back of the sofa, sar. He's hardly moved off there since she went away."

Valera re-entered the châlet, took the rhamphastos on his wrist, and with the volume of "Don Quixote" beneath his arm, returned to his mother's house. During the three days that he remained in the town no further news was heard of Leona Lacoste, neither could he elicit any information from her neighbours. No one appeared to have seen her go, or to know more than the fact that she was gone.

Armed with the authority contained in her father's letter to herself, which he found in the deed-box, he religiously carried out the directions she had left him, and having disposed of the house and its contents, lodged the money in a Rio bank in Leona's name. And then, with a very heavy heart and full of miserable forebodings, he took leave of his mother and his friends, and set off on his road to New York.

* * * * *

The first part of the journey was performed

by steamer. Valera had scarcely set his foot on board and lost sight of Rio pier, before he began bitterly to reproach himself that he had not remained longer in his native town, in order to prosecute his search for Leona.

Why had he so readily abandoned himself to the general conclusion that she was perfectly well able to take care of herself, and even permitted one or two jealous doubts to take possession of his mind as to whether she had really had the courage to commence the world alone? What, if she should be at this very moment in need of his assistance—in danger, in distress, in perplexity; and he, her Tobalito, steaming far away in the opposite direction to her? Should he ever hear of or from her again? Would her letters ever reach him in New York? Was their sweet childish friendship dissolved for ever? Valera had no occasion thus to reproach himself, for he had amply done his duty towards Leona, and giving up

a journey on which all his future hopes of success depended could in no wise have assisted her. The appointment he was going to New York to take up, that of a foreign correspondent and traveller to the firm of Upjohn and Halliday, had been procured for him more than a year previously, and he had spent all that time in acquiring a knowledge of the duties that would be required of him—an occupation in which poor Lacoste had materially assisted him by his apparently marvellous knowledge of the English language. To have failed in taking up his appointment at the time agreed upon would have been virtually to resign it, and Christobal Valera had his mother as well as himself to think of in the matter. Yet he blamed himself for nothing —as lovers will—and was thoroughly unhinged and low-spirited from the moment of leaving Rio. His first few days on board were spent as usual, more in the seclusion of his cabin

than anywhere else, but at the end of that period he felt he had overcome the enemy, and eagerly sought the fresh air of the deck.

It was a lovely evening; the passengers were mostly above stairs, and the deck was crowded. Valera's eyes roved indifferently over the groups of women, children, and nurses who mostly did his handsome face the honour of a prolonged stare, to the further end of the vessel, where a few of his own sex were assembled, smoking. He hardly wished or expected to make the acquaintance of any of them, but one figure attracted his attention so often, that at last, by the sheer force of sympathy, he took a seat behind it. It was that of a young man of, perhaps, eighteen or twenty years of age, who, attired in a loosely-made white suit of clothes, with a broad leaf hat, worn well over his brows, was leaning over the gunwale, smoking a cigarette, with his eyes fixed upon the water.

Why he experienced a desire to see this youth nearer, Christobal never knew, but he certainly waited with much patience, or pertinacity, until some chance movement should make him turn his head so that he might see his features.

Meanwhile, the only view he could obtain was that of a very youthful-looking throat and a crop of thick chestnut hair that was not long enough to cover it. As he was gazing at the back of the stranger, however, and wondering why he should interest himself in the subject, a slight movement under one of his arms attracted his attention. The next moment two little beady eyes and a tiny black snout were thrust into view.

They were the eyes and snout of Pepita!

CHAPTER V.

QUITE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

In a moment the truth flashed on Valera, yet he did not dare believe it.

"Pepita," he said nervously.

The dog, who had known him for years, and was an affectionate little brute, wriggled its small body from beneath the arm that held it, and commenced to lick his hand; but the figure of the youth leaning over the gunwale gave no evidence that he was aware of what was going on behind him.

"Poor little Pepa! So you know me again, do you?" continued Valera, in hopes of attracting the attention of the owner of the dog.

Still there was no movement—no sign of recognition.

"*Leona!*" he next ventured to whisper below his breath.

Then she answered, but without turning her head, so afraid was she of the effects of too sudden a confirmation of his suspicion.

"My name is Leon d'Acosta, senor."

"I ask ten thousand pardons, Senor d'Acosta," replied Valera, trembling with the excitement of his discovery, the truth of which her voice had confirmed, "but I think we must have had the pleasure of meeting before. May I offer you a cigar?"

Leona turned and looked him steadily in the face.

"Many thanks, senor. I will throw away mine in recognition of your politeness. Do you speak English?"

At this hint Valera fell into that language,

of which they were probably the only students on board.

"Leona, what a delight and a surprise to find you here."

"Please call me Leon, or you will not get used to it. It should not have been a surprise. I told you I could look after myself."

"But in this dress."

She laughed slightly as she looked down at it.

"It doesn't suit me, I know, but it is convenient as a disguise."

"And where is all your beautiful hair?"

"Lying in a ditch ten miles the other side of Rio—at least, that is where I left it. But if we wish to talk undisturbed we had better make some excuse to go down to your cabin. Everyone is watching us here."

"Oh! *do* come," said Valera, earnestly. I am most anxious both to hear your own plans and to tell you what I have done."

As he concluded the sentence Leona caught up Pepita and rose from her seat.

"*Caramba*" she exclaimed, in his own language, using a Spaniard's most ordinary expression, "if you do not believe my word, senor, perhaps you will believe your own eyes. Five hundred ducats to a doubloon that you've never smoked a cigar equal to what I can give you this side of the Equator! You won't take the bet? Right! Neither would I. 'Twould be sheer robbery. But be good enough to accompany me to my cabin, and you shall taste the cigar. *Allons!*"

She commenced to stroll leisurely in the direction of the cabin as she spoke, and as Valera followed her, he could not help wondering at the easy grace with which she filled her part, and the admirable disguise it was, to which, however, the effeminacy of many of the men in those southern climates much assisted her. But the woman was a born

actress, and as she sauntered in front of him, with her broad leaf hat slightly tipped to one side, and her cigar between her lips, Christobal could see how much she enjoyed keeping up the little mystification that evidently surrounded her in the eyes of her fellow-passengers.

But when they had reached the cabin he occupied, and the door was closed upon them, her manner changed. She threw herself down upon the first seat that came to hand, with an air of such complete weariness as disarmed any animadversions he might have felt disposed to make upon her conduct.

"And so you left me to take care of myself, Tobal?" she commenced, reproachfully.

"My dear Leona! I would have done anything in the world for you——"

"Except the one thing I asked—that you should take me away from that horrible

"But if I had known that you intended to leave it by yourself——"

"Bah. If you did not know, you should have known. Why will men never believe that women can mean what they say—and that at once! You proposed instead that I should remain there, on the very spot, under the charge of your mother. You must be a fool, Tobal."

"But most people would have thought it a very desirable arrangement for a young girl like yourself."

"I am not 'most people.' I am Leona Lacoste, and you, who have known me from a little child, should be able to believe I did not make up my mind without necessity. And the end of it is that I am here."

"But why in this disguise?"

"When you returned from Rio, did you not try to discover where I had gone?"

"Of course I did. It was my first thought."

"And how far did you trace me?"

"I could trace you nowhere. From all the nearest villages and towns through which I calculated you must have passed in order to leave home at all, not a scrap of information was to be gained."

"Just so, *mon frère*. But had you asked if they had seen a young man driving a mule——"

"But it never entered my head to ask such a thing, Leona."

"And that is just why it entered mine to assume the dress, Tobalito. And after all it is most convenient for travelling in. No man would have dared to insult me a second time if dressed like a woman. Few will attempt it the first time as I am dressed now."

"You don't look so very formidable an antagonist, after all," said Valera, smiling.

"Let them try it who dare," replied Leona, with a dark flush upon her face. "But tell

me now, Tobal, what you have done since I saw you last."

Valera then repeated to her what he had heard from his mother and Epiphania—the trouble he had taken on her behalf, and the money he had realised and placed in the Rio bank for her.

"Good brother!" she said, caressingly, when he had concluded. "And now one word more. *Did you see Ribeiro before you started?*"

She put the question with such evident constraint that it surprised him.

"I did see him, Leona."

"And did he speak to you of—of—my father?"

"Only to demand back his share of the money sunk in that last unlucky speculation of theirs."

"Did you give it him?"

"Not a piastre. It is not his due. They

went partners in the chance of gain—it is only fair they should go partners in the certainty of loss."

"And he did not speak to you of—of—*anything else?*"

"Of nothing else—certainly of nothing of consequence. But why are you so anxious about it, Leona? Why do you fear him?"

She looked around the cabin cautiously before she answered.

"Promise me secrecy, Tobal! Promise that you will never repeat what I am going to tell you, and you shall know. *I hate Ribeiro.* I hate him and I fear him! I wish that he were dead; and if I could kill him without detection I would. But they shan't say it of me too—not of me too."

"Leona!" cried Valera, alarmed at her manner, "how has the brute insulted you? what has he said or done? *Dios!* if you had but told me more before we started!"

"I did not wish to tell you. I had my reasons for concealment. But he *is* a brute, Christobal — a lying, cowardly, unscrupulous brute! And he knew something—he had heard something—that he threatened to use against me; and if I had remained there, *I might*—I might have been *compelled to marry him.*"

She uttered the last words in so low a tone that had Valera not been stooping over her he would hardly have caught them.

"*Been compelled to marry him!*" he cried aloud in his astonishment. "To marry that low scoundrelly Portuguese! And you, who scorn the idea of marriage with any man! Leona, what horrible secret of yours does this man possess that he should hold so much power over you?"

"Oh! not of mine—not of mine," she said unhesitatingly. "I have no secrets, Tobal, that you do not know."

"Of whose, then?"

"Of my poor father's."

"And that was——"

"A *lie*, which I will repeat to no one. A lie, Tobal. I am sure of it as I stand here, but one which I have no power of disproving. And I knew that if I remained in my old house that man would never cease to persecute me, until I had given up everything to save my dead father's name from calumny and falsehood; or he would blazon the vile slander, as he threatened to do, amongst the people who have respected us, until every finger would have pointed at me with scorn."

"But are you not afraid that his rage at your departure will produce the same effect?"

"No, for in the first place it would be useless, and in the second it would destroy all chance of his succeeding in his object if we meet again. But we shall never meet again, Tobal—I have taken my oath of that—or, if we

do, I shall be so altered he will not know me."

"You have carved out a difficult path for yourself, Leona."

"I know I have. And I have something here," she continued, pressing her hand upon her heart, "which makes it ten times more difficult. But I will struggle through it, even if I fall in the attempt."

"It is a wonder to hear you confess to feeling the least degree of weakness, Leona. And you cannot be brought to believe that a burden shared is only half as heavy, and that my love and sympathy might help to lighten the load you carry."

"I have them both," she answered shortly.

"But not as I would give them to you."

"Bah! Would you make me a woman again just as I'm turned into a man? If you talk to me in that way, Tobal, I will not come

into your cabin," said Leona, rising from her seat.

"You will not go so soon," he pleaded.

"I have stayed too long since you have forgotten the warning I gave you last time we met. Your memory is short, Don Christobal."

"The joy of meeting you must be my excuse. I will not offend again. Say adieu to me in the old familiar fashion, Leona."

"I think not, Tobal. We have left the wild woods and are entering upon a more civilised existence. Let us conform to its customs for the future."

"You will not be so cruel."

"It is your own fault if I appear so. But you have overstepped the bounds of friendship lately, and have robbed all our little familiarities of their innocent charm. I am sorry for it, but I have no more pleasure in kissing you, Tobal."

"How I wish I had never spoken," cried the young Spaniard, despondingly. "But it is so hard to be with you and not love you, Leona."

"Listen to me, Tobal. If you do not wish to make it harder by not being with me at all, we must start on a new plan from to-day. We must be friends and nothing more. The days of our childhood are passed. The world is opening before us both; we must attend to our work and let nothing interfere with it. You can be a great help to me if you choose, do not be a hindrance. It will be good for me, a stranger in the great city of New York, to know that you are at hand in case of need; but if you do not promise me to check all such feelings as you have been betrayed into displaying towards me lately, I will not let you even see me."

"Oh, Leona! you are not a true woman—you have no heart!"

The girl's lip slightly quivered, but she as instantly checked the action.

"I know I have not, and I am glad of it. What should I do with such an incumbrance on my present journey? We may not have many more opportunities of speaking in private whilst on board, Tobal, so pray remember my caution. I am Leon d'Acosta, a youth whose acquaintance you have picked up on the steamer, and in whose affairs you have but a passing interest. Don't try to interfere with anything I may do or say, or show any unusual familiarity, or you may force me to pretend to take no notice of you."

"Why could you not have confided your plans to me previously, and passed as my brother," said Valera, downcast at the prospect of their divided interests.

"I gave you the option and you refused. We won't revert to that any more, Tobal. You know that I am somewhat of a mimic, and

that I have lived amongst men long enough to make their manners sit on me almost as well as these loose suits of my poor father's do. You need have no fear, therefore, of my sex being suspected. And should I disguise myself too well for the ladies' peace of mind," she added, laughing, "why, I'll hand them over to you. Now, let us return to the deck. There is one personage after whose fate you have quite forgotten to inquire, and that is my mule."

"Ah, poor Pedro! What has become of him?"

"*Caramba*, senor," she replied, as, with the little dog tucked under her arm, she left the cabin, and reassumed the nonchalant air she had dropped whilst there. "You never saw such another animal as that mule. The saints defend us! how he could trot. I trotted him once for a wager ten miles against a beast double his own height, and brought him in eight minutes before the other without a hair

turned. And he went at last, saddle, silver trappings, and, by my faith, a suit of woman's clothes into the bargain, for a couple of doubloons! *Sacristi! That* was a beast?"

"The last item sounds suspicious," said Valera, humouring her mood.

"The sound is all you will hear of it, senor. I am not one to tell my lady's secrets," rejoined Leona, as she resumed her old seat by the side of the vessel.

* * * * *

Yet with all the joy of finding Leona again the days that followed were a sore trial to Valera. Knowing who she was, and what she was, he became jealous of every man that approached her; and she, with all a woman's innate coquetry, despite her garb and assumption of indifference towards himself, seemed to take the greatest delight in torturing him. Day after day, until the steamer reached its last landing-stage, she slighted his company

for that of other men, and he stood apart, gloomy and self-absorbed, whilst she interchanged jokes and saucy remarks with those of his sex who imagined she belonged to theirs, and treated her as men treat an impudent boy with whom it is not worth their while to quarrel. Now and again Valera caught her by herself, reproached her with her unkindness, but she was never without an answer for him.

"Would you have me do things by halves," she would cry indignantly, "assume a garb and then betray that I am unused to wear it? How unreasonable you are, Tobal; but there, you are a man, and what can one expect otherwise. But I am not so weak as to give in to your caprices."

"Do you call it caprice to wish the dearest friend I possess in this world to exhibit some small proof that she cares for me?"

"Certainly I do, when your friend is not a

'she,' and to exhibit it would be to betray herself."

"Oh, Leona! you are the veriest 'she' that ever existed."

"Matteo and Guzman do not think so. They are ready enough to accept me for what I appear to be."

"That is what so much enrages me. To see those fellows tapping you on the shoulder and addressing you as familiarly as if you were one of themselves!"

"How strange that what appears to me a compliment you should take as an insult. But I shall have a better opportunity of distinguishing myself in my new character before long. I shall quarrel with Guzman, Christobal."

"Leona! I entreat of you to be careful," said Valera with real alarm. "The man might be dangerous. What has he done to offend you?"

"We do not agree," she answered abruptly.

"Then avoid his company, or the subjects that offend him. You frighten me by your rash way of speaking, *m'amie.*"

"I am quite able to take care of myself," said Leona, in her old independent tone.

Valera took her words for a girl's bravado, until, a few days later, he overheard some of the other passengers talking about her.

"He'll get the worst of it, to a certainty," said one man to the other.

"Of course he will. What should such a youth know about duelling? And with such a dead shot like Guzman."

The name rivetted Christobal's attention.

"May I ask to whom you allude?" he said, addressing one of the speakers.

"Certainly, senor. It is no secret. Young d'Acosta has a little affair on this evening with Don Silvester Guzman."

"They have arranged to meet?"

"They have; at the next landing-stage which we reach, at eight this evening."

"*Madre di Dios!* And for what reason?"

"That is best known to themselves, senor. They quarrelled over some difference of opinion this morning, and the result is as I have told you. I am sorry for d'Acosta. He is a pretty youth, and Guzman has no pity."

"But it must not be, gentlemen. It *shall* not be. It is a butchery—a slaughter. The lad is too young—too inexperienced," exclaimed Valera with agitation, hardly knowing what he said.

"He is not too young to quarrel, senor. *Sacristi!* You should have heard the two this morning! And Guzman is resolved to give him a lesson. Poor boy! I trust it may not prove his last one."

"The meeting must be prevented at all risks!" cried Valera. "The captain must be spoken to."

"That will be useless, senor. The captain of a steamboat has no authority over his passengers. He will laugh at your interference."

"Then Guzman must be reasoned with himself. If he stains his hand with one drop of that boy's blood, he must answer for it to me."

"*Caramba*, senor, one would imagine you were defending the cause of a woman instead of a man," remarked one of his listeners, laughing.

The expression recalled Valera to himself. If he betrayed Leona she might never forgive him. He resolved to appeal to her own fears, the risk she ran, and the necessity there was for running it. But here he found himself baffled. The girl, evidently aware of, and prepared for, the opposition she would encounter, rigidly avoided all chance of a private interview with him.

He hovered about her all day in an agony

of nervous apprehension, but she kept scrupulously on the men's side of the vessel, and refused either to read his appealing looks, or to understand his half-disguised entreaties to be allowed to speak to her alone.

"You have not been below decks once to-day, d'Acosta," he said entreatingly.

"I prefer the fresh air, senor," was her reply.

"Might I ask the favour of a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"I am ready to listen to anything you may have to say."

"But my communication is private."

"I must ask you to postpone it till to-morrow then, senor. I am pledged to play a game of cards with Don Matteo."

"Give up your game, and listen to me," he said imploringly.

"To-morrow, to-morrow, senor," she answered lightly, as she commenced her game.

She guessed the purport of his desired communication, and was determined to defeat it.

"Valera will not persuade young d'Acosta to relinquish his revenge," remarked one of the bystanders. "The youth has mettle. He will go through with it."

"But will never come out of it," was the response.

But Valera was not to be put off so easily.

"D'Acosta, I *must* speak to you," he said at last in desperation.

"There is no such word as *must* in my dictionary, senor," she answered.

"But there is in mine. And if you are determined to balk me——"

"If I am determined to balk you," repeated Leona, without looking up from her cards—*what then?*"

"*I will disclose all I know,*" hissed Valera into her ear.

She rose from her seat and confronted him unflinchingly.

"In which case," she said, with a slow and steady emphasis, "I should request *you* to meet me afterwards, Don Valera."

"Which you know I could never do," he answered energetically.

"Then I should brand you a coward and drop your acquaintance," she continued as firmly as before.

Their eyes met. Valera's sunk before the fiery flash of hers, which said so plainly, *Thwart me and you lose me for ever*, and he turned away sick at heart with the dread of what was coming, but unable to see how he could prevent what Leona was determined to carry through.

The steamboat reached its next landing-stage at eight that evening. Valera, who had been hovering round Leona all day, anxiously watching for the moment when she should dis-

embark, rushed downstairs for his purse as the side of the boat grated against the end of the rickety landing pier, resolved to accompany her when she went ashore, whether with her will or against it. As he entered the saloon of the steamer, however, he ran up violently against and upset a toddling infant, thereby seriously injuring its tender little frame.

"Oh my child! you have killed it," screamed the mother, as its loud cries resounded through the vessel. In common humanity Valera could do no less than stop and inquire how much damage had been done. The poor little child's face was covered with blood, and he could feel for nothing but the mother's distress until proper assistance had been rendered, and it was found that the injuries he had inflicted were less alarming than they appeared to be. Then he had leisure to remember his mission, and the time he had wasted in fulfilling it. He sprang on deck again, but only to find that

Leona and Guzman had already left the steamer. At that Valera gave vent to an oath of rage and alarm, clapped his sombrero tightly over his eyes, and followed them on shore with all the speed of which he was capable.

CHAPTER VI.

LEONA'S STRAIGHT SHOT.

A DUEL is so common a thing in the country where to stick a man in the back with a bowie-knife, or to shoot him across the dinner-table with a revolver, are every-day occurrences, that none of the passengers except the two or three directly interested in the affair had considered it worth their while to follow Guzman and d'Acosta to the place of meeting. It pleased them better to linger on the deck of the steamboat, enjoying the evening air and watching the various scenes that took place on the quay, or to stroll up and down the jetty smoking their cigars until it was time to re-embark, than to meddle in a business which

might end very unpleasantly for one or both parties concerned in it. They hardly expected to see both the combatants return to the steamboat, and perhaps they had one or more little bets dependent on the result of their meeting, but there their interest in the event came to a standstill. Valera could hardly get an answer to the eager questions that fell from his lips respecting the direction which the duellists had taken, but as he stepped off the pier he fell in with a man bent on the same errand as himself—namely, to watch the issue of the proceedings—and with whom he almost ran to the place of meeting.

"I know the exact spot in that wood yonder," said his new acquaintance, "for I've been in this place before and so has Guzman. Is he your friend?"

"Certainly not," said Valera. "I consider him a coward and a bully to challenge so young a lad as d'Acosta, and have come pre-

pared to tell him so directly this affair is over."

"Then there will be a second meeting?"

"If d'Acosta's pistol spares him, yes! A second meeting, and, I trust, a final one. The sooner the world's rid of such a brute as Guzman the better."

"You speak interestedly, my friend; but do you know the rights of the quarrel?"

"I know nothing except that Guzman has consented to meet a boy half his age and with half his experience. It is not satisfaction—it is murder! If there were any laws in this country such a butchery would be punishable by death."

"But, *caramba!* it was the little one that challenged him! They came to words over some difference of opinion, and d'Acosta gave Guzman the lie to his face. He could not, in honour, have refused to meet him, though I

believe he regretted it almost as much as you do. Guzman is not bad at heart."

"Oh my foolish Leona!" sighed Valera to himself. But he openly said:

"I can accept no excuses, senor. I would as soon meet a woman as a tender lad like that."

"You are much interested in d'Acosta," said his companion, with curiosity.

"I have known him before!" replied Valera.

They had now nearly arrived at the place of meeting. Already they could distinguish the little group of men arranging themselves in position on a grassy plot. Already could Valera's eye detect the suit of white and the broad leaf hat that marked the figure of the creature he loved best in the world, and it made his heart stand still with sickening fear.

As they came up with them the duellist had just taken their places.

"Stop!" cried Valera, authoritatively. Guzman and Leona lowered their weapons, and the latter turned round to him.

"What do you mean by this interruption, senor?" she demanded fiercely.

"Cannot this matter be arranged otherwise?" continued Valera, appealing to Guzman. "You are scarcely a fair match for this youth, senor; and should anything happen to him, you may get into more trouble than you think of."

"I have given Senor d'Acosta the option of an apology," replied Guzman, as he quietly lighted a cigar with which to employ the interval, "and he has refused to take it."

"I have!" said Leona, "and I refuse it again. You insulted me by doubting my word, and I demand satisfaction; more, I will have it. This gentleman," intimating Valera, "has not the slightest authority for interfering in the settlement of my disputes."

"I have not even heard the cause of quarrel," commenced Christobal.

"It is one which you of all men have the best means of settling," replied Guzman.

"Senors," interrupted Leona, haughtily, "I object to any discussion on the cause of quarrel. I refuse to make an apology. I should refuse to accept one, and I demand that the duel proceeds. If Don Valera has any objection to make to my resentment of his unwarrantable interference, I shall be happy to settle our differences afterwards."

The seconds then advanced to place the antagonists in proper position. Valera's alarm amounted to agony. The cold sweat stood on his forehead—he trembled in every limb—he turned his eyes imploringly to Leona.

"*For the love of God, Leon,*" he said earnestly.

At the tenderness which his voice expressed,

she could not fail also to feel. She went up to him for one moment and pressed his hand, whilst their eyes met.

"Thanks, my friend," she said, with unflinching firmness. "But have no fear for me. I have none for myself."

"Senor!" exclaimed Valera, as he rushed over to the side of Guzman, "if a hair of that lad's head is injured, you will have to answer for it to me."

"Indeed!" was the reply, with shrugged shoulders; "then, if I understand you rightly, I am expected to stand here and be shot at like a target. Sorry to disoblige you, senor but I prefer the alternative of meeting you afterwards."

"D'Acosta has gone too far! Guzman means mischief," whispered the man who had accompanied Valera to the place of meeting.

"To business, gentlemen," cried the

seconds, as they placed Guzman and Leona back to back.

"You are each to take sixteen paces forward as we count them, then turn and fire!"

The seconds commenced to count—the antagonists to walk—One, Two, Three, Four! Every nerve in Valera's body began to quiver; he could only send up a kind of gasping prayer that he might retain his consciousness. Five, Six, Seven, Eight! The perspiration stood in large beads upon his forehead—Leona's figure was growing less distinct to his failing vision. Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve! Should he rush between them and receive Guzman's fire in his own heart? Oh! the thought of that tender flesh torn by powder and bullet! Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen—"*Mother of God! save her!*" burst in an agonised scream from his lips, but, as he said it, the final number was pronounced, the combatants had turned, and

his last words were lost in the sharp cracking reports of two pistols.

"Saints defend us, Guzman's down!" said the man by his side, in a tone of the utmost surprise. The news revived Valera. He rushed up to Leona.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, anxiously.

"No," she said, wildly; "but *he* is."

All the woman had come back to her in the idea that she might have killed her antagonist. She grew deadly pale, threw down her pistol on the ground, and crossed over quickly to where the seconds were kneeling by Guzman's side.

"He is not seriously wounded, gentlemen?" she said, anxiously.

"I hope not, senor, but the shot has entered his chest. *Caramba!* but you have a straight aim. The wound bleeds outwardly—that is a good sign; but we should have assistance as soon as possible."

"What do you want? Tell me. I will run and fetch it," cried Leona, "or Valera here will. What is it, gentlemen? Wine—brandy—a doctor? Ah! let me know at once."

All her forced courage and intrepidity had fled. She was shaking like an aspen-leaf in her anxiety lest she had done irremediable harm. The wounded man saw her distress, and held out his hand.

"Good lad," he said faintly, "do not alarm yourself. It is a mere bagatelle after all. I admire a steady aim and an unflinching nerve, but I like a tender heart better. We will be friends henceforward, will we not?"

Leona was crying, but she tried hard to keep back her tears.

"If you will permit it, senor; but you are too good—too forgiving. It was all the effect of my bad temper. If I have injured you seriously I shall never forgive myself."

"It is nothing, you will see," replied Guzman; but, as he said the words, he fainted.

"We must have something to carry him back to the boat on," said his second. "And perhaps we had better fetch a doctor to him first, if there is one to be found."

"There must be one in the town!" exclaimed Leona. "At all events we can but ask. Run, Valera," she continued, turning to Christobal, "run as fast as ever you can and inquire for a doctor, and bring back a bed —a hurdle—anything on which to carry him to the steamer."

But Valera, being quit of his own anxiety respecting Leona's safety, was not over-pleased to see hers for that of her rival.

"I should think Don Guzman's friends were the properest people to procure what he may require," he answered, somewhat sullenly. "I have no right to interfere."

"Senor, how *can* you stand on etiquette at such a moment? Pray lose no time in procuring us assistance; or, if you really will not help us I must go myself. If anything should happen to Don Guzman by reason of this affair I shall die of grief."

"Do you want the whole lot of them to know that you're a woman?" said Christobal, as he went straight up to Leona, and whispered in her ear.

"Christobal, no! What are you dreaming of?" she answered, in the same tone.

"That you betray yourself with every word you speak, that this romantic interest about the man you were resolved, against all advice, to meet, is ridiculous—foolishly and absurdly feminine, and if you do not show a little more reason in the matter, your sex will become apparent to the whole company."

He spoke angrily — jealously — and the woman resented the tone he adopted. It was

hard for him, doubtless, who had been suffering so acutely on her account, to find that, as soon as the danger was over, all her sympathies seemed to be enlisted on the side of the man by whose aim she might have been stretched lifeless on the sward at that very moment. But quick, impulsive, emotional, like all her sex who have any claim to the name of woman, Leona only felt that she was safe, and the blood of her enemy might lie on her head, and was as ready now to fall down and administer to Don Guzman's smallest need, as she had been an hour before to shoot him through the heart.

"If none of these gentlemen will take the trouble to fetch a doctor for him, I will go myself," she said, as she turned from them and ran quickly in the direction of the town. Two of the men were at her heels in a minute, but Valera, though he longed to follow too, turned proudly away, and professed to direct

his interest towards Guzman, who had revived from his temporary unconsciousness.

"Fine young fellow!" remarked the wounded man, in a weak voice. "I am glad he hasn't killed me. He would have felt it so much."

"Rather clap-trap business to my mind," said Christobal. "I don't admire emotion in a man."

"He is not a man," replied Guzman. "He is but a boy. I wonder if he has any sisters," he continued, with a faint smile; "if he has, I shall tell him he must give me one in return for this."

This remark, innocently as it was made, went to Valera's soul. In a moment his quick, jealous spirit foresaw and dreaded the confidences that might ensue upon a reconciliation between the duellists, and he could almost have found it in his heart to wish that Leona's shot had taken a better effect than it had.

He turned away from Guzman's side, and walked apart moodily. In the course of time Leona reappeared, accompanied by her companions, an old Brazilian doctor and a species of stretcher. Guzman's wound, though serious, was not pronounced dangerous, and he was permitted to proceed on his journey. The bullet was extracted then and there, the sick man placed upon the stretcher, and the little cavalcade took its way back to the place of embarkation—Leona walking by Don Guzman's side, Valera some little way in the rear. The doctor, on extracting the ball, had laid it in Don Guzman's hand, with the jesting advice to keep it in memory of a narrow escape. Guzman now transferred it to that of Leona.

"It is more yours than mine, d'Acosta, and I am glad to have the opportunity of returning it to you. Perhaps you will place it amongst your curiosities as a memento that

sometimes courage stands in good place of experience."

"I will preserve it as a holy relic, senor," she answered, as she placed it in her bosom; "and thank our Lady each time I see it that I was prevented taking the life of a good and brave man by my headstrong folly. By rights this bullet should have been in me instead of you."

"Heaven forbid!" said Guzman earnestly, as he regarded her fine face and figure with interest.

Christobal overheard the conversation, and cavilled at it. He felt as angry now with Leona for risking the discovery of her sex as he had done before with her for concealing it.

The party reached the steamboat in safety, and Don Guzman was comfortably disposed in his berth. Still the girl hovered about him, arranging his pillows and offering him refreshment, until the doctor requested that every-

body should leave the cabin and give his patient the chance of going to sleep. Valera, who, in his jealousy, could not keep away from Leona, and had also been present at the little scene, followed her into the saloon, intending to remonstrate with her when they should reach the deck, but as she passed his cabin door, which stood open, she staggered, reeled, and finally fell over the travelling-case that stood upon the threshold. Christobal's illusion vanished—he had his arms around her in a moment.

"My darling, what is the matter?" he cried, with apprehension. She did not, as usual, resent the fond appellation. On the contrary, she permitted him to raise her, and leaned up against his breast as though the shelter it afforded were necessary in her weak condition.

"Leona, are you wounded after all?" continued Valera, unable to comprehend the

change which had, so suddenly taken place in her.

"Only here, Tobal—only here," she answered, pressing her hand against her heart. "Oh, if I had killed him, what *should* I have done?"

"You seem to have taken an unaccountable fancy to this Guzman," said Christobal, his jealous fears again in the ascendant.

"You are mistaken, Tobal. It is an accountable hatred I have taken to myself. I have only just escaped committing murder. *Have* I escaped it? I had all the will, the desire for revenge. Will my hands ever be clean again?"

"You are overcome, Leona. Notwithstanding your boasted strength, this excitement has been too much for you, or you would not talk such nonsense."

"Oh, don't say so, Tobal. I—I have a double reason for avoiding all such mischances.

He will not die, Tobal—tell me he will not die."

"Not from your shot, *m'amie,* though it was directed with all your heart to his. I shall begin to be afraid of quarrelling with you, Leona. I had no idea you could shoot so straight."

"Don't speak so, Tobal. I said hasty words in my anger to you. I was so afraid you would tell them I was a woman; but I did not mean them. I shall never quarrel with you, dear brother—never—*never.* I have had enough of quarrelling," and here the poor girl began to cry, and Christobal to kiss the tears away. It was well for the success of Leona's reputation, as one of the masculine gender, that there were no spectators to their reconciliation.

"And now tell me, *m'amie,*" said Valera, when the girl's sobs had somewhat subsided, "what was the cause of the quarrel between

Guzman and yourself that led to this result?"

All the Brazilian blood rushed to her cheek as she was reminded of it. Her companion could read at a glance how much the quarrel had agitated her.

"He doubted my word," she said indignantly. "He did more. He gave me the lie to my face. Oh, Tobal, when I think of that I am glad that I met him."

"But on what subject, Leona, did he contradict you?" demanded Valera, with increasing curiosity.

"He denied your Spanish birth, *mon frère.* He said you were only a Portuguese—a half-breed."

"*He did, did he?*" said Valera, with set teeth, forgetting all but the greatest insult that could be offered him.

"Yes; and when I attested your parentage —said I had known you almost from your

birth—he laughed. *Laughed* at me, Christobal, for a foolish boy who didn't know the difference between a Spanish and Portuguese when I saw them."

"I wish to heaven I had kept to my resolution and challenged him as soon as you had done with him," exclaimed Don Christobal, fiercely.

"Ah, no! Tobalito, my brother, my friend, spare him further. He has had his lesson. Surely you can trust your honour with Leona."

The loving tones recalled him to a sense of what he owed her.

"And you did this for me—*for me*," he exclaimed, joyfully. "You risked your precious life for me, Leona, my darling!"

But as he grew warmer she chilled.

"Surely yes, Tobal, as you would risk yours any day for me. *Am I not your sister?*"

"But you should not have run such a risk.

You might have perished, and what then would have been the world to me?"

"We must all run risks occasionally," she answered, with a touch of her former intrepidity, "and since it is well over, let us say no more about it. But—but, I hope," with a slight shudder, "the necessity for it will never arise again!"

* * * * *

Don Guzman's wound progressed favourably. After a few days' nursing, all anxiety ceased to be felt on his account, although he was considered an invalid to the end of the voyage. It was not long before Leona and Christobal had to exchange the steamboat for the train, whilst Don Guzman's destination took him in another direction. They parted, however, the best of friends, and with many hopes, on Guzman's side at least, of meeting again; but though Valera felt easier when Leona had lost sight of her admiring antagonist, he could

never quite satisfy himself as to how much or how little she returned his professions of cordiality. For—from the day that her physical weakness had led her into betraying her sentiments in the cabin—she had withdrawn into her former self, and resented any idea that a softer feeling had mingled with her eagerness to avenge the honour of Valera's name. So they travelled on together—excellent company, but no more—the man anxious only to construe each affectionate look or word into something warmer than it was intended to convey—the woman, to repel his advances without wounding his too sensitive love for herself. And ever and anon, a lurking jealousy of Guzman would spring up in the breast of Valera, who was only too ready to interpret each sigh or downcast look, or dreamy reverie on the part of Leona into a regret of her separation from the stranger, whose destinies had been so strangely entangled with her own. At last the weary

journey was all but accomplished, and another day would bring them to New York. At the last town at which they slept (by Leona's particular desire) Valera missed her. They had dined together, and after dinner he had strolled out with his cigar, and coming back to the hotel, found that she had left it for a walk.

He sat down to wait quietly for her return, never dreaming that she could be long absent, but hour after hour slipped away and still she had not come back. Valera now grew anxious —he always was anxious when Leona was concerned—and had some idea of going out to seek her—still, the fear of missing her kept him to his post.

Just as his anxiety was at its height, and he had made up his mind to follow in her pursuit, one of the hotel servants brought him a card inscribed in a delicate feminine hand—

"DONNA ANITA SILVANO."

"I don't know the Donna. Who is she?" he inquired of the attendant.

"I cannot say, senor. She is a stranger to us, but says she is an old acquaintance of yours."

"She has the advantage of me then. I am just going out on business. I have no time to receive her."

"I told the lady you were going out, senor, and she says she will not detain you a moment."

"Well, I suppose I must admit her then," said Valera, vexed at the delay, and by no means friendlily disposed towards his mysterious visitor. "Show the donna up."

The servant obeyed his orders, and in another minute a female figure, closely veiled and shrouded, stood before him.

CHAPTER VII.

DONNA ANITA.

THE dusk was falling fast, and for a moment Valera could not distinguish whether his visitor was old or young. With chivalrous courtesy he advanced to meet her at the door and lead her to a seat. Then he perceived that the undulations of her figure were not those of an old woman, and his curiosity became piqued to discover who she could possibly be, and what she might want with him at such an hour.

"You are at a loss to account for the meaning of this visit, senor," she said, in a thin piping voice, which instantly disenchanted him, so unlike was it to the rich harmony of Leona's tones.

"I confess, donna, that it is as unexpected as it is flattering," he replied. "You were good enough to say you were acquainted with me. Surely I can never have had the happiness of knowing and yet have forgotten you."

"I should rather have said I was acquainted with your family, senor. I have had the honour of speaking to your mother, Donna Josefa."

"Indeed! That must have been more years ago than I can give you the credit of having counted."

"You have the flattering Spanish tongue, Don Christobal; none who heard you speak could doubt your nationality! But I have heard of you from others than your mother. I come from New York, and am intimately acquainted with some of the principal members of the firm you are about to join in the capacity of foreign correspondent!"

This announcement much interested Valera.

He was like an emigrant about to enter on a new world, and anxious to hear all he could concerning it.

"Indeed, donna. I was not aware that the English of New York mixed so intimately in foreign society."

"We have no 'foreigners' in New York, senor. The city is cosmopolitan. We ignore the nationality, and look only to the individual. I cannot say that fortune has thrown me intimately into the society of Mr. Halliday or Mr. Upjohn, but they bear an excellent name for hospitality amongst us. And they are expecting with no small anxiety the arrival of the new member of the firm!"

Christobal coloured with gratification. This was an honour of which he had little dreamed a mere clerk would be invested.

"I am proud to hear you say so, donna; but it is more than I deserve—an unknown, inexperienced youth——"

"Inexperienced perhaps, senor," interrupted the stranger, who still kept herself closely veiled, "but, pardon me, not unknown. The good old name of Valera is a household word in Spain, and your future employers are perfectly aware of its worth, and what may be expected from one who bears it."

"It pleases me more than I can say to hear you acknowledge it," replied Valera; "for my name is the only possession I can boast of. You are also Spanish, Donna Anita?"

"I am also Spanish, Don Christobal, and in that fact lies hid the reason of my visit to you. I am jealous for the honour of our country—of our names."

"You alarm me. What cause have you for fear?" said Valera, tenderly, as he essayed to take the lady's hand.

But she drew it away from him.

"A rumour reached New York before I left it to the effect that a duel had been fought

on board the steamer in which you travelled from Rio Janeiro, and that you had some hand in it."

"Pardon me; that was a mistake. A duel was fought, sorely against my wish, but I was neither principal nor second in the affair."

"But you took a deep interest in some one who was?"

"That I cannot deny, donna."

"And that some one was a woman in disguise?"

"*Caramba!*" exclaimed Valera, startled out of his propriety. "Who can have repeated such a story?"

"Is it true, senor, or not?" demanded the stranger.

"I do not know by what right you put such a question to me, donna. But supposing it were true, how can it affect *my* reputation?"

"Only that the principals of your firm are excessively particular about the conduct of their clerks, and that the report of your being accompanied from Rio by a woman in the disguise of a boy has greatly annoyed and disappointed them."

Donna Anita spoke inquiringly, as though she expected Valera to deny the allegation, instead of which he walked away from her side and stood with his face towards the open balcony, thoughtfully pulling his moustaches.

"You have nothing to advance in your own favour, Don Christobal?" she said, after a pause.

"I do not see any need for my speaking, donna. I am at least not responsible to *you* for any follies of which I may have been guilty."

"That is hardly a grateful speech after the trouble I have taken to warn you, senor. For the sake of your name and the friendship

I bore your mother, I seek your presence at the risk of my own reputation, to save yours; and all the reward I get is to incur your displeasure and be subjected to your sarcasm."

"Oh, forgive me, Donna Anita! I acknowledge your goodness and intrepidity in coming to tell me of this, but it has greatly upset me. So long as I perform my public duties conscientiously, what possible right can my employers have to cavil at my private actions?"

"Every fresh word you utter convinces me that the report they heard is true," said the stranger. "It was an imprudence, senor, to say the least of it—or folly on your part—more than folly on hers."

"You do not know of what you are speaking," returned Christobal, hotly.

"I am quite sure I must be correct in saying that any woman who could so far degrade herself as to appear in the garb

the other sex, must be lost to all sense of female modesty and decorum."

"She is not. She is as pure and discreet as any woman living," cried Valera, blurting out the truth in his anxiety to defend Leona's honour.

"Ah, then your employers have heard rightly that your travelling companion was a lady in disguise. I am afraid it will go hardly with your situation in consequence, senor. Messrs. Upjohn and Halliday are very unlikely to overlook so serious a breach of decorum."

"You wrung the truth from me," answered Valera, biting his lip. "And if you consider you obtained it by fair means, you must make what use of it you think fit. I am at your mercy. Only this you must believe—that the woman you speak of is as true and pure a woman as ever breathed, and that she assumed her disguise for reasons of her own, and totally

apart from any idea of travelling in my company."

"Oh, I really cannot consent to listen to the praises of one whose conduct was so very questionable," said Donna Anita, as she rose from her chair and shook out her skirts. "I suppose you have had your peccadilloes to answer for, the same as other gentlemen, senor, and may not be able to hold yourself entirely blameless of the sin of loving 'not wisely but too well;' but you should know better than to attempt to palm it off as a virtue on your lady friends. I consider it an insult to my dignity that such a creature as the one I allude to should be mentioned in my presence. Pray let me hear no more of her!"

"But you *must* hear more, madam," exclaimed Valera, as he placed himself across her path. "You have introduced yourself, a perfect stranger, to me, to vilify and traduce one of the noblest and most pure-minded women

God ever made; and I cannot let you go until you have heard me deny to the death all you have said against her. She has been my sister and my friend since childhood. I love and honour her above all her sex, and I will lose my promised situation, and throw up every prospect I have in life, sooner than stand by quietly and hear one slur cast upon her character. She is the most courageous, the most generous, the most——"

"Oh! stop! Christobal, stop! I cannot hear one word more. I have heard too much already!" cried Donna Anita Silvano, as she threw off her mantilla, and hood, and veil, and disclosed to his astonished gaze the lightning eyes, and smiling mouth, and milk-white teeth of *Leona Lacoste.*

"*Leona!*" he exclaimed, in real astonishment, as he fell backward and stared at her.

"Yes, truly Leona! and fancy, my brother, that you should know me so little that a veil

and a hood have the power to transform me into another woman. Pesta! how warm the things have made me! My face is burning from your compliments and the weather. Come! kiss me, Tobal, for the valiant way in which you stood up for Leona behind her back. I thought I would make your Spanish blood rise. Now confess! Did I not play my part well?"

"So well that I am in utter astonishment still. Are you sure that you *are* Leona, or that Donna Anita is not hidden somewhere in this dusky room? What did you do to your voice—your air—your expression? How did you ever think of making up such a story, and frightening me with the prospect of losing my poor appointment —and all for your sake, you wicked rogue!"

Leona's laugh rang through the apartment.

"Saint Jago! how alarmed you looked. But you have a stout heart, Tobal, and you

love me far more than I deserve. Give me some sherbet, for my tongue's parched with so much abuse of myself, and then I will tell you all my history. Ah! how beautifully I deceived you!"

"But who would have dreamt of seeing you in these? Are they your own?" said Valera, as he touched her dress and mantilla.

"My own, of course. Am I in the habit of wearing those of other women? And did you expect I should walk into New York in my poor father's old gardening suit, Tobal? What an idea! But, then, what can one expect from men?"

"You have had your hair curled," remarked Valera, as he passed his hand over the thick crop. "How nice it looks."

"Keep your hands to yourself, Tobal; you will disarrange my *chevelure*. Yes, I went first into a barber's, and had my hair curled, and then I went to a modiste's and told her I

wanted a ready-made dress and mantilla for a masquerade, Tobal, mind you, for a masquerade. *Caramba!* How I laughed!"

"And what did the modiste say?"

"She prophesied I should make a pretty girl enough, and gave me a kiss with her receipt. I changed my clothes in her back room, got her to write my name upon a card, and came back to the hotel to see how far I could impose upon my brother."

"Which you did to any length. You might have left me in the same perplexity had it been your will. I was most completely and thoroughly taken in. But then I could not see your eyes, Leona," he added tenderly, "or I should not have been such a fool as to mistake them for those of anybody else."

"I would not have been so cruel as not to undeceive you quickly. But I am glad you were deceived; it was a test of my power. And now that the dread of forfeiting your situation is off your mind, and I am no longer

likely to disgrace you by my disguise, let us talk of our plans for to-morrow, Tobal."

"I shall first see you comfortably settled in rooms, Leona, and then go and present myself to the principals of my firm."

"*Après?*"

"Then I must find rooms for myself."

"Will not the same rooms do for both of us?" demanded Leona.

"No, they would not," replied Valera shortly; and he said no more.

"But we are to pass as brother and sister, Tobal; have we not agreed upon that?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied with a sigh. "But how will you manage about your name, *m'amie?*"

"There will be no necessity to speak of it. The world will think that I call myself d'Acosta because I am on the stage."

"You are still determined to be nothing but an actress?"

"What else is there for me to be? I

want to make money, Tobal, and the opportunities for a woman to make money are so few. All I have to sell is my beauty. Can I sell it any other way?"

"God forbid!" cried Valera, with a sudden pain. "But why are you so anxious to make money, Leona?"

"Must I not live?" she replied, evasively.

"And when you have made a name for yourself, I suppose you will be going to England, and leaving me all alone."

"*To England?* Ah, no—not to England," exclaimed Leona, with a sudden look of horror.

"Why, *m'amie?* what is there in that word to frighten you?"

But the girl, over-excited and over-tired perhaps, only answered his question with a burst of tears. Christobal was by her side in a moment, but she put him from her impatiently.

"Why do you speak of England? Why

do you ever mention the place, when you know how my father hated it? Oh my poor, poor father! How I wish that I could forget everything in the grave with him."

She sobbed herself into serenity again, like an impulsive child, and Valera, used to see the emotional side of her nature, was waiting quietly until she should be able to resume the conversation, when a loud voice was heard in the corridor exclaiming in English:

"Here — quick — presto! I am nearly starved to death. Bring me stew, ragouts, fowl—anything you've got, so long as there's none of that infernal garlic in it—into the saloon as soon as you can serve it. And beer, man. Look alive and give me beer. By Jove, what weather to travel in, and what a people to travel amongst!"

The saloon in which Leona and Christobal were sitting was a public one, and the owner of the voice entered as he spoke, shaking the

dust from the travelling-coat he held in his hand. He was a short, stout, red-faced man, of about fifty, of unmistakable British stamp. As he caught sight of Leona he bowed in a rough, off-hand manner, and proceeded to apologise for the fervour with which he had dispensed his orders.

"But with these infernal foreigners——" he commenced.

But here, guessing by their appearance at the nationality of his new acquaintances, he halted and looked foolish.

"Pray don't mind us," replied Valera, in his prettily-accented English, "we can quite sympathise in your difficulties. Can I be of any use in explaining to the waiter what you may want?"

"Much obliged, I'm sure, monsieur. Are you French?"

"No; I am Spanish. But I can speak both languages."

"And madam?" inquired the Englishman, not knowing exactly by what title to designate Leona.

"Mademoiselle is my sister," said Christobal. Leona bowed in her grand, lofty way, and the stranger having jerked a response, acquaintanceship was established between them.

"It's very awkward for a fellow to light upon one of those exclusively foreign hotels," said the Englishman; "and I don't know what the deuce my New York friends meant by giving me this address. I suppose there are English hotels here?"

"I think not. This is but a small town."

"I can manage to *parlez-vous* pretty well, and I *have* made my wants known in German; but hang it all, when it comes to Spanish it's enough to crack a fellow's jaw. And I have just come off the railway, after six hours' travelling, and am as hungry as a hunter."

"Let me give your orders," repeated Valera.

"Thank you, sir! if it's not too much trouble, I shall be obliged to you. I just want a decent dinner, with wine that won't make me ill, and that's all."

"Your name, monsieur?"

"Ah, true! Rouse, my good fellow. John Rouse, bound from New York to Boston. I shall owe you an eternal debt of gratitude, I'm sure."

As Christobal disappeared on his errand of mercy, Mr. Rouse turned to the contemplation of Leona, and thought he saw before him one of the most glorious women his eyes had ever beheld. The sight of him did not strike his fair companion with equal favour. Naturally prejudiced against his country and countrymen, this short, spare, thick-built Englishman did not appear to have much chance of disabusing her mind of a pre-conceived dislike. She turned her back upon him, and looked out of the open window.

"Mademoiselle is also Spanish?" said Mr. John Rouse, wishing to enter into conversation.

"A woman is generally of the same nationality as her brother, monsieur," was the evasive reply.

"Sharp, by Jove!" muttered her companion. "Is mademoiselle also on her travels?"

"We are on our road to New York."

"Ah, I wish you joy of it. The most expensive place to live in of the whole world. You have friends there?"

Leona resented this questioning, yet something led her on to answer it.

"No; we have but ourselves to look to. We are alone in the world, and have to work for our living."

"You are too beautiful to work, mademoiselle," said the Englishman roughly, but not rudely. "You should leave that to the men to do for you. I warrant there'd be no lack of volunteers for the service."

"But I would rather work for myself," replied Leona.

"And may I ask in what direction your work lies?"

"I am going to be an actress," she answered proudly.

"*By Jove!*"

The stranger seemed quite struck by the idea. He slapped his hand on his thigh, and continued to stare at Leona earnestly. Not till Valera returned with the announcement that his dinner would be served within the shortest time possible did Mr. John Rouse find his tongue again.

"Your sister here is an actress, sir."

"She hopes to be so. It is her desire," replied Christobal.

"How strange that I should have fallen in with you. Here am I, journeying down to Boston for the very purpose of superintending the opening of a new theatre there, and on the

look-out for members to make up a company as I go."

"Indeed, that *is* curious," said Valera, indifferently.

But Leona was not indifferent. At the mention of a theatre and a company, her eyes sparkled and her cheek flushed, and the commonplace stranger became invested with a halo of romance.

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed as she drew nearer to the table at which Mr. Rouse was seated.

"Your sister has the very face and figure for the stage," continued the manager to Valera. "A noble presence and commanding height. I'll guarantee she'll make her fortune on the boards."

"But she has never acted. She has everything to learn," said Christobal.

"I'll warrant she *can* act. I read it in her eye—the trick of her voice—her expression.

I do not often pronounce a judgment at first sight, but here I feel I am not mistaken. And such beauty, sir," he continued in a lower tone, intended for Valera's ear alone, "such unusually transcendent beauty! Such a face and figure are worth all the talent in the world. Trust *me.*"

Valera saw the manager's eager look and shuddered. Leona's words about selling her beauty came back like ice upon his heart.

"And you are going to Boston?" said the girl, evidently anxious that the conversation should not be discontinued.

"I am going to Boston, mademoiselle. I have come from England on purpose to put some new pieces on the stage there, and I have visited New York first to see if I could find any ladies to suit my purpose, and been disappointed. But if you will come with me to Boston I will engage to give you an appearance there within the month, and as good a salary

as a beginner could expect to draw. You must remember you have, as your brother says, everything to learn."

"It is quite impossible!" exclaimed Valera, but Leona interrupted.

"Are you in earnest, monsieur? Will you really give me an engagement without seeing more of me than you have done?"

"I am in earnest. I offer you on the spot fifteen dollars a week if you will come with me to Boston, and appear on the stage of my new theatre."

"Oh, Tobal, how fortunate I am! This is just what I have been wanting. I shall have no more trouble in the matter. Was ever such luck as mine?"

"But we are going to New York, Leona, and Boston is miles away. We are much obliged to this gentleman for his kindness, but you cannot accept his offer."

"But why not, Tobal? What is to hinder

me? Where shall I get such a chance again?"

"Ah! it's no easy matter to get on the stage in New York," said Mr. Rouse. "All the stars over from England; every theatre crammed; and actors and actresses going for a song. If you want a good thing, mademoiselle, you'll take my offer."

"You hear what monsieur says, Christobal. And how am I to live unless I get work?"

"*I will support you,*" replied Valera, falling into his native tongue. "*Do not go with this man, beloved, for the light of my life will go with you.*"

But this was not the way to conciliate Leona. She frowned at the tender message, and ignored its affectionate entreaty.

"What nonsense you talk, Christobal. If we are never to part for a few weeks or months we may just starve together. I must decide for myself in this matter. Monsieur Rouse, I

accept your offer, and I will go with you to Boston."

"That's a fine girl," exclaimed the Englishman, "and you shan't regret it. By George! that face of yours ought to stir them up. We shall have them pulling down the theatre to get at you. Well, that's a bargain then. Strike hands upon it," he continued, slapping his great fist across hers, "and we'll make out the papers and sign them before we sleep to-night."

"I will be no party to the transaction," said Valera excitedly, as he rushed from the apartment. He was deeply, cruelly hurt to find that Leona was so ready to leave his company and protection for that of another man; but beyond this, a great and appalling fear had come over him at the idea of trusting the beautiful and unsophisticated girl, whom he loved with so true a devotion, to the tender mercies of an utter stranger, and the dangers of a perilous profession, in an unknown place,

and at a distance from himself. Horrible visions of all the misadventures that might befall Leona—of how they might never meet again, or meet estranged and with divided interests—floated through his mind until he had worked himself up to a pitch of madness.

He was walking rapidly up and down the garden that surrounded the hotel, brooding on all the unhappy circumstances that had led to this catastrophe, when he was startled by the subject of his reverie flying under cover of the darkness into his very arms.

"Take me away, Tobal," she exclaimed wildly, as her heart beat fast against his arm. "Take me away this very minute. I will not stay in this place another hour."

"What is the matter, *m'amie?* Has that man dared to insult you?"

"No, no; only take me away before he sees either of us again. I cannot stay here any longer."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD."

THE tone in which Leona spoke—her very words, so reminded Valera of that other time when she had clung to him in like manner, and entreated him to take her away from the place in which she had been born, that for the moment he could only suppose that she had again encountered Ribeiro, of whom she seemed to stand so much in awe.

"Tell me your cause of alarm, my dear Leona, and I shall be better able to help you. What! *you* trembling so much that you cannot stand upright—you, who, apparently without a quiver, put that bullet so straight

into poor Guzman's breast! Where's the brave defender of my honour gone to?"

"I would rather fight twenty duels in succession than go with that man to Boston, Tobal. Oh! don't let me leave you. Let us go on to New York by the night mail, and have no more to say to him."

"My dear Leona! no one could be better pleased to hear your decision than I am. I have been making myself wretched ever since you said you would accept his offer, with the idea of being separated from you. But why have you changed your mind?"

"I don't know. I can't tell you; only that it is changed."

"Is it the distance, the uncertainty, the strange life that frightens you, Leona?"

"Again I say that I cannot tell you. Only I will not go to Boston with Monsieur Rouse."

"Is it the thought of our separation,

darling?" whispered Valera, in his tenderest tone.

But the rapidity with which the girl immediately disengaged herself from his grasp gave the answer before it was spoken.

"Bah, no!" she exclaimed, with no small degree of irritation. "Why is it that whenever I come to lean on you as a friend, Tobal, and to ask your advice on some important matter, you directly do something to make me angry? What has our separation to do with our work? We are both bound to work, and if our work lies in opposite directions, we are bound to separate. We should look like two fools if we went whining and pining about the world every time we had to part for a few weeks. I tell you plainly that I won't go to Boston, and I want to go to New York, as we first arranged. Is not that sufficient? Why do you directly want to know the reason? But, like all men, you are made up of curiosity."

"I thought I could act better for you if I understood the meaning of your change of feeling."

"Well, then, you won't know it. There is nothing to know. So you must act without it, Tobal."

"I am only too happy to act for you at all. And now what does your imperious majesty wish me to do?"

"Pay the bill, put the baggage on a car, and take me to catch the night mail to New York."

"Without speaking to the Englishman?"

"Why should we speak to him?".

"Common politeness demands it from us; besides which he visits New York, and he might meet you there some day, when your breach of faith with him might injure you in your profession."

This consideration had more weight with Leona than any other. She weighed the consequences.

"Are you sure he will not insist upon my going with him?"

"Quite sure! Why, *m'amie,* this is a free country. Who could *insist* upon taking you anywhere unless it was your desire to go? And you have signed no papers for him."

"No, he is drawing up the agreement at this moment. Go to him at once, Tobalito, and say I am ill—mad—anything—but I cannot go to Boston."

"I will settle it in a flash of lightning, *m'amie,*" said the young man, delighted to be sent on such an errand. "Do you go to bed and rest well, and we will proceed to New York by the first train in the morning."

Pleased as he was at the fact of Leona having changed her mind about going to Boston, Valera still puzzled himself to discover the reason she had done so. His pleasant self-gratulation that it was for his own sake, she had nipped in the bud. And knowing the

girl's indomitable will when she had once determined on a certain course of action, and the eagerness with which she had accepted the unexpected good fortune that had fallen in her way, he felt that some extraordinary cause must have suddenly arisen to shake her resolution.

He found Mr. John Rouse busy over some sheets of foolscap paper, which he had partly covered with writing.

"Look here, monsieur, what's your name?" he commenced as he caught sight of Valera. "It is not always the custom to have a written agreement in these cases, because the ghost walks regularly every week you see, and when there's no money in the till all the agreements in the world won't get it out."

But here (perceiving Don Christobal's look of unmitigated astonishment and mystification) the manager consented to interpret.

"Ah, don't understand our lingo, I see.

What I mean is, that as mademoiselle will be paid weekly she'll always have the option of cutting if she doesn't get her salary—still, as she's new to the business, and I like things ship-shape, I thought I'd just put it down in a few words of writing, and then there can't be any mistake about the matter."

And here Mr. Rouse began to read over a document commencing "An agreement entered into this twentieth day of May——" etc. etc.

"But stop, monsieur!" said Valera, interrupting the manager's flow of eloquence. "My sister is very sorry to have given you this trouble, but she has changed her mind—she cannot go with you to Boston."

Mr. Rouse's face fell considerably.

"Whew!—changed her mind. That's bad. What has she done that for?"

"I cannot tell you. Women can seldom give a reason for their actions. But made-

moiselle is quite determined to give up the engagement you offered her."

"But that is folly—madness, in her position. Look here, monsieur," continued the Englishman as he turned in his chair and confronted Valera, "if that girl will only trust herself to me she'll make a fortune. I have travelled half over the world, and seen all sorts of women, but I never saw such a face and figure together in my life before. She'd create a sensation, sir, and that's what the stage wants nowadays. Talent, experience, perseverance, study, everything may go to the winds so long as you'll give the public a new sensation. And I could have done it with your sister, sir, I could have done it with your sister. Can you say nothing to make her alter her mind again?"

"I am afraid not," said Christobal, pretending to look and feel sorry; "and I am sure both mademoiselle's apologies and mine are due to you for——"

"D—n your apologies!" cried the manager, though good-naturedly. "What I want is your sister. Here have I been knocking about here, there, and everywhere, on the look-out for something startling, and just when I think I've got it, the girl *changes her mind!* Bother women's minds, they're at all four points of the compass at once. And I'd taken a fancy to mademoiselle, too, outside her appearance, as I was telling her just now. She reminds me forcibly of an old friend I had once in Liverpool. I'm a Liverpool man, monsieur, bred and born in the place, and know every inch of it. But I bet in the whole length and breadth of the town I couldn't find such another face as mademoiselle's. She's glorious—like a colossal statue of the Medici. Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk. I suppose there's nothing more to be said or done about it, sir, and my agreement, and my agreement here is so much waste paper."

"I am quite sure mademoiselle will not alter her mind again, monsieur. I think the suddenness of the proposal, and the distance and the prospect of our separation, perhaps, have somewhat alarmed her."

"*Is* she your sister?" demanded the manager abruptly.

Valera's heightened colour told the truth for him.

"Very well, then, I won't say anything more against mademoiselle's determination," said Mr. Rouse. "Only tell her from me that if she happens to repent her refusal, or to find an engagement difficult to obtain in New York, she has but to remember my name and address, and if I haven't gone back to Liverpool, I'll do my best to serve her. By George! she *is* like old Evans," concluded the manager, as he slapped his knee. Valera parted with him with a friendly shake of the hand, and went back to tell Leona that

he had settled that business for her, and she was free to go wherever she chose.

Still, the reason of her sudden refusal remained a mystery to him.

* * * * *

Some two days afterwards, Mr. Benjamin Burrage, manager and proprietor of one of the principal theatres in New York, was sitting in his office surrounded by letters and bills, and in anything but a sweet temper. Every minute was he interrupted in his perusal of applications for employment, for orders, or for personal interviews, by the entrance of the stage-manager or the property-man, with various demands for more hands, more scenery, or more costumes, until Mr. Burrage felt very much inclined to do somebody a damage, and more than inclined to swear. At last, after having to the best of his ability satisfied the requirements of both his subordinates, he turned to the stage-manager and said, "Have

you found me a captain of the guard yet?"

"I have not, sir."

"How is that? Are there no women left in the city of New York?"

"Plenty; but none that come up to your standard, so far as I can see. I have had dozens of applicants, but none tall enough or handsome enough. You want a perfect giantess."

"*I will have five foot seven!* What would she look like beside De Brassey?"

"You'll have to put up with a boy."

"I won't have a boy! Awkward brutes they are at that age! And nothing draws like a fine woman in armour."

"You'll have to send to England for her, then. We don't make the article out here."

"I'll have her if I send to the antipodes."

"Well, there are plenty waiting your inspection at the present moment."

"Any tall ones amongst them?"

"Two or three."

"Well, don't you let any one in unless she brings a note of introduction from Westwell. Mind that! It's my strict order."

"Very good, sir. Are you ready to see them now?"

"In half a minute. Let me finish my letters first; and mind what I say to you, Brabant. It's no good sending in any dumpy ones."

The stage-manager retired, and Mr. Burrage reapplied himself to the inspection of his papers. It is no sinecure to be the manager of a theatre. Putting the real business connected with his property out of sight, the worries with which he has no right to be worried, are sufficient to take up all his time. The demands for a free entrance (to which every shoemaker who sells him a pair of boots considers himself entitled)—the distracting

appeals for work—the queries on subjects totally unconnected with his office—the requests for autographs, or introductions, or information, would occupy, if attended to, many more days than there are in the week. And even the effort of opening such epistles and casting them on one side is enough of itself to upset the equanimity of any man's temper.

Mr. Benjamin Burrage was good-natured enough as things go. He was a thoroughly honest, upright, and hard-working man, and an experienced actor, who took most of the characters that were in his line upon himself. He was always ready to dip his hand into his pocket to relieve a case of want or suffering, and he was clear-sighted enough to be able to distinguish between merit and self-assertion amongst the men and women he employed, and to reward them accordingly. But he was sharp and brusque in his manner of speaking,

calling a spade a spade, and never going out of his way to pay a compliment, or to smooth down the rough edges of an unpleasant truth.

Consequently he was pronounced to be excessively disagreeable by those he did not like, and even the few whom he did like stood rather in awe of their manager finding fault with them.

It was with quite a timid hand that, a few minutes later, the property-man knocked again at Mr. Burrage's door.

"What the devil do you want now?"

"Are you ready to see the ladies yet, sir? They've been waiting a long time."

"Oh, aye! show them in. But one at a time, mind—one at a time."

The first applicant for the post of Captain of the Guard was a tall, thin, antiquated female, of some thirty-four summers, whose long curls, drooping on either side her face, scarcely served to hide the crows'-feet about her eyes.

The manager regarded her for a moment with a steady glare, then waving his hand towards a seat, dropped his eyes upon his desk again, and commenced to write and talk at the same time.

"Well, madam, what may your business with me be? My minutes are precious."

"I have ventured to intrude myself upon your presence, sir——"

"Yes, yes, yes! I know all that! *What do you want?*"

The lady, on being thus abruptly appealed to, shook her curls and became nervous.

"Being the eldest of a family of six daughters, now, unfortunately, left fatherless, with a widowed mother to support and look after——"

"Madam!" exclaimed the manager, thumping his desk with an energy that caused the unhappy visitor to jump in her chair, "it's nothing to me if your mother is a wife or a

widow. I've no time to listen to such rubbish. I want to know what you've come to ask me for."

"I have a letter of introduction to you from Mr. Westwell."

"Very good. Go on. Come to the point."

"And Mr. Westwell, knowing how much we need money, thought if I could go on the stage——"

"What's your line, ma'am?"

"My what, sir?"

"Your line of business. What can you *do?*"

"I could do anything you wished me, sir."

"*How* could you do *anything I wished you?*" grunted Burrage, contemptuously. "One woman can't fill every part. What are your legs like?"

"*Sir?*"

"Have you got good legs? Not ashamed to show them, eh? What's your age?"

"Well, I'm really not quite sure. Mamma says that——"

"No time to hear what mamma says. Now look here, my good lady. You're five-and-thirty if you're a day. What the devil do you expect one to do with you at that time of life?"

The tears welled up into the poor woman's eyes from shame and mortification, but she forced them back into their springs again.

"I have often acted in private theatricals, so I thought perhaps——"

"You thought all wrong. Private theatricals have nothing to do with the stage. Now just you listen to me. You wouldn't find a place open in my theatre for you unless you meant to go in for comic old women."

"Comic old women!" almost shrieked the supplicant for histrionic honours.

"Yes, ma'am, and I couldn't take you without training even for that."

"You have insulted me, Mr. Burrage," said the lady indignantly, as she was preparing to leave the office.

"Very good, ma'am, very good, ma'am," replied the manager, not half listening to her words.

"Here, Cheeseman, show the next lady in."

The next lady and the next proved just as unsatisfactory. Fifteen candidates at least passed in review before Mr. Benjamin Burrage that morning, and were dismissed with a grunt of disapproval, with the curt but emphatic sentence "that they wouldn't do."

"I believe all the oldest and most hideous women in New York are in a league to come up here and drive me mad," he exclaimed at last. "Why, there hasn't been a good-looking face amongst the lot."

"All the good-looking ones are small," replied Brabant, oracularly. "Never saw a tall, well-made woman in my life yet."

"Then you haven't used your eyes over that foreign critter that's been walking up and down outside the box-office the whole morning, begging you to smuggle her in to the governor," remarked Cheeseman, slyly.

"What's she like?" demanded Burrage.

"Oh, a tarnation fine woman, sir. Such eyes, such a smile, and the size of a grenadier."

"Then why haven't you shown her into me, you fool!"

"You said your particular orders were that no one was to be admitted without an introduction from Mr. Westwell."

"Yes, but how was I to know Juno herself was going to ask for admittance. Bring the girl in at once, Cheeseman, and woe betide you if she falls short of anything you've said of her!"

"I'm not afraid of that," said Cheeseman as he left the stage, and in another minute

returned with Leona. She was dressed completely in black—the costume in which she had personated Donna Anita, and wore her mantilla over her shoulder, the only concession she had made to New York fashions being that her beautiful face was shaded by a large black hat, with a curled brim and drooping feather, that suited it admirably.

As she sailed upon the stage with that undulating swimming movement of hers, acquired from the perfect freedom with which her limbs had moved from infancy, and raised her golden brown eyes to the manager's face, Mr. Burrage exchanged looks of congratulation with Mr. Brabant.

"Well, my dear, and what is your name?" he commenced, affably.

"Elena d'Acosta, monsieur," she replied, for so she had determined to call herself, in order that Ribeiro might not discover her destination from the playbills.

"What are you—a Spaniard?"

"A Brazilian."

"By Jove, the Brazils are in luck! And how do you come to speak English so well?"

"I learned it from my—from an old man, I mean, who lived in the place where I was born."

"And what do you want to speak to me for?"

"I want to go on the stage, monsieur. I have to support myself, and I don't care for anything but acting."

"But you'd have to stand still on the stage at first, you know, and look on till you learnt your business—eh?"

"I would do anything you thought best."

"That's a good girl. Now just walk up and down the stage three or four times, will you?"

Leona did as she was required, and as the

manager's practised eyes followed her graceful movements he chuckled and rubbed his hands.

"That'll do, my dear; that'll do. What do you think of that for my Captain of the Guard, *eh, Brabant?*"

"You couldn't do better, to my mind."

"No big women in New York. No handsome women in New York, *eh, Brabant?* I won't send *you* foraging for beauty again. You haven't half got your eyes about you. Why, where was this southern goddess hid that you never saw her? She's divine, Brabant; she's perfectly divine. I shall constitute Cheeseman my Prime Minister on the spot."

Meanwhile Leona, whose ears the manager's speech was not intended to reach, stood apart, thoughtful and anxious, wondering whether the whispered conversation foreboded good or evil to her.

"What salary do you ask, my dear, now?" inquired Mr. Burrage.

"I never thought of that, monsieur. I am quite a beginner. I do not wish to take any more than you think my services are worth," she answered, with a touch of the old pride.

"Well, now. I'll speak plainly to you, my dear. Your services are worth *nothing*—nothing at all. They may be by-and-by; but at this moment I wouldn't give you a cent a week for them."

"But how then——" she commenced with heaving breast.

"Now, stop a moment; don't be in a hurry. Your services mayn't be worth a cent, but your figure is—at all events to me just now. I want a fine woman to play the Captain of the Guard in the new burlesque of 'Semiramis' that we're just going to put upon the stage. Will that suit you? I'll give you ten dollars a week down, and a certain engagement for three months. What do you say to my offer?"

"Oh, I'll take it, monsieur," cried Leona, eagerly.

Her heart's desire was gratified at last. She was enrolled as a member of the company of the Memphis Theatre at New York.

* * * * *

But when Valera came to hear of the engagement he grumbled at it. Tobal always grumbled at everything she did—so Leona averred.

"But you've only got about ten lines to speak, *m'amie.* I thought you wanted to become a grand actress. How are you to learn anything by standing on the stage dressed in a suit of armour?"

"But such armour, Tobalito! It will dazzle your eyes only to look at me—all gold and silver scales, with a blue velvet petticoat, and white and scarlet feathers in my casque. It is splendid! I never saw so beautiful a dress before."

"And the public will say they never saw so beautiful a woman," sighed Valera.

"And are you not glad that I am beautiful —if I *am* beautiful ?" asked Leona.

"No, *m'amie*, not just at present. It is selfish of me, I know, but I cannot bear the thought that all the world should be able to go and admire you as I do."

"What do you suppose I care for the world ?" replied the girl, resenting as usual his air of sentiment. "I want to make money, Tobalito, and if I cannot make it yet by talking, why I will stand upon the stage until I do. The talking will come in good time. Wait till you hear how I deliver my ten lines."

The talking did come, sooner than Leona had anticipated, though not from her own mouth.

Although she had but ten lines to speak for herself, New York talked for her, and be-

fore many weeks were over her head, the chief subject of comment in that great city was the marvellous beauty of the Captain of the Guard in "Semiramis."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. JOHN ROUSE.

JUST twelve months after the events related in the last chapter, a young woman was standing before a mirror in a pleasant, cheerful-looking room in one of the most respectable—if not one of the most fashionable—streets of New York.

It was Leona Lacoste, or, to designate her as she was generally known, Elena d'Acosta.

She had now been a year upon the stage, and though she had not yet made the fortune prophesied for her by Mr. John Rouse, she was earning sufficient money to keep herself in comfort and respectability, and had also managed to lay aside a few dollars against sickness or

any other emergency. She was rapidly gaining favour with the manager of the Memphis from her love of her art and steady application to business; and from having stood on the stage to be admired as the Captain of the Guard, had been promoted to fill all the male parts that could be adequately represented by a woman.

As she stood before the mirror thoughtfully trying the effect of a white horsehair wig, it was easy to read from the expression of her face and the lines that had developed about her eyes and mouth, that the qualities of which she had so strongly evinced the possession before coming to New York, had increased rather than lessened with the experience of the year. There was the same strange liquid light in the golden-brown eyes that had driven half the youth of the city crazy to get an introduction to the beautiful Brazilian; the sunny head she had so ruthlessly shorn of its glory when it served her purposes to do so, was

again crowned with a rippling veil of chestnut tresses; her complexion—the curves of her mouth, her creamy skin—were as delicate as they had ever been; but there was an older, more matured look about Leona now than the passage of a twelvemonth warranted, and which seemed quite beyond the belief of her eighteen summers. It was *thought* that had done this—thought and anxiety; and even Valera imagined at times the presence of tears; though of what Leona should be afraid altogether passed his comprehension. He had watched over her since their arrival in New York with the solicitude of a father, brother, and lover combined, but had been totally unable to discover any reason for her occasional fits of despondency and restlessness. He attributed them at last to the reaction of her life of excitement, and sighed that it was beyond his power to induce her to resign it.

He had been terribly jealous at first of the

sensation she caused and the admiration she excited, and his hot Spanish blood had risen in revolt against the daring aspirants to her favour, who sent her letters, and flowers, and presents as intimations of their wishes. But when he saw how utterly indifferent Leona was to all their advances, how little she valued the offerings or the adulation, and how strenuously she refused the acquaintanceship of her admirers, Valera ceased to thirst for an occasion of taking their blood. It was really not worth while to waste his time fighting for a woman who knew so well how to look after herself, and the most wary and scrupulous lover could not have found fault with the nonchalant manner with which Elena d'Acosta received the advances of the public.

Yet Christobal himself had made no way with her. Affectionate she was to him as she had ever been; he was still her Christal and her brother; and when he was cross and had

to be coaxed into good humour again, her Tobal and her Tobalito—but there she drew a line. She did not give him all her confidence. Christobal felt, even whilst her kisses were on his brow, that there was a locked chamber in her heart into which he had never penetrated.

Yet could he have rifled it he would not have found much to help to unravel the mystery—only an old letter and a signet-ring, and the memory of hateful, scorching words that burned into her very soul.

She never alluded to it, but it was always there, and her dreams of revenge were fast riveted, if indistinct. She was like the beautiful panther whom she so much resembled. Leona was crouched now, silent and motionless, but her eyes were stealthily set upon the one object of her hate, and she was ready to spring directly the opportunity presented itself.

How absurd to be writing of wild beasts and thoughts of revenge when a beautiful

woman is in the case! Leona was more beautiful this year than she had been last, and as Christobal Valera quietly entered her apartments and watched her settling the horsehair wig first to one side and then the other, he thought so too.

"Well, *m'amie,* and how long will it be before you have persuaded that bundle of horsehair to sit to your satisfaction?"

"*Sanctissima!* Tobal, how you startled me! What do you mean by gliding in like a cat o' mountain, and frightening a woman out of her seven senses? But how pale you are, *mon frère!* What is the matter?"

"Nothing! A touch of the sun, perhaps. It is powerful enough to-day. And what may that new erection be for, Leona?"

"For the Chevalier de Poigny, in the new melodrama, monsieur. How shall I look in a powdered *queue* and primrose satin knee-breeches, embroidered in gold, eh, Tobal?"

"Another male costume," grumbled Valera. "How I hate to see you fill these men's parts, Leona! Cannot Mr. Burrage give you a character more befitting your sex? He is making a perfect trade of you."

"Bah! Stop thy foolish tongue," replied the girl. "The chief gives me the parts I fill best, of course. If you want me to play women, you had better think of some means of exchanging my stature. I am too tall for the boys as it is. I believe I've grown this last year. I shall never find a man to acknowledge I am the right height for a woman," she went on, laughing, "'*just as high as his heart*,' unless I make up to the American giant."

"I know a heart you have never outstripped," said Valera, quietly.

"*Mon frère*, you must really be ill! you are beginning to talk sentiment again. I thought I had cured you of that, ages ago. Not only sentiment but nonsense (if they are

not one and the same thing), for you know my height has equalled yours some time past."

Which, indeed, was true; for as the friends stood side by side before the looking-glass, there was not a quarter of an inch to choose between them.

"I have news for you, Leona!" said Valera, after a pause.

"Good news, I hope!"

"That is as you take it. *I* ought to think it good. My employers express themselves so much pleased with the manner in which I have transacted their business during the last year, that they are about to advance me to a post of honour."

"I am so glad! What is it, Tobal?"

"They intend to send me on a mission involving some trust, to one of their corresponding firms in England."

"*To England! You are going to England?*"

The very name of the country seemed to

affect Leona so palpably that she changed colour.

"I believe so. I should have refused the offer on the spot, Leona, entailing, as it does, a separation from yourself, but it was intimated to me that to do so would be greatly to militate against my interests in the trade, and perhaps prevent my ever having such a chance of promotion again."

"Of course. You would be mad not to accept it. It is a proof of your employers' trust in you. You cannot tell to what it may lead. When do you start?"

"Next month, I believe."

"It will do you good. Christal, you are really not well to-day. Your eyes look sunk to me."

"It is fancy, *m'amie!* I am only tired. But with respect to my visit to England. They say I may be absent for a year, and I thought it would be such a good opportunity for you

to get an introduction to the English stage, Leona."

"*For me?*" she echoed, sharply. "No, thank you, Tobal. I prefer to remain where I am."

"And have you no wish to see England, then?"

The girl's face darkened like a thunder-cloud.

"To see the country my father hated—mix with the people he could not speak of without a shudder. What do you take me for, Christobal? Have I not commanded you never to mention the name of England to me? I will not go! That is enough! Let me hear no more about it! *I remain here,*" she concluded, with a stamp of her foot upon the carpet. Valera seemed too weary to argue the matter.

"Very good, *m'amie.* Don't be angry about it," he answered, quietly.

Leona turned round and caught the look of suffering.

"Oh! you are ill," she exclaimed, affectionately, as she took a seat on the couch beside him and essayed to draw his head down on her bosom; "rest yourself here, and let me order you some cooling drink. Shall I?" she continued coaxingly, as she pressed her fresh lips upon his feverish forehead.

But the position and the action seemed to torture Valera. He struggled into a sitting posture again. Do what he could, he had not been able to teach his heart to regard Leona as a sister. He could not accept so much from her without wishing for more.

"Any amount of flowers as usual!" he said, with a faint attempt at a laugh, as he regarded the bouquets on the table.

"Yes! some fool sent them into my dressing-room last night. He did not give his name, so I could not return them. General Bastell forwarded me a lovely set of opals yesterday forenoon. I sent them back to him

by post this morning, labelled, 'Declined with thanks.' Won't he be in a rage when he opens the parcel?"

"You are a good girl, Leona," said Valera admiringly; "a good, honest girl."

"Holy Virgin! what do you expect me to be? Had I kept the jewels, what would the old General have wished me to take next? Himself, perhaps. *Merci, monsieur!* I don't know about being honest, but I wish you would credit me with a little taste."

"The New Yorkers consider your taste only too exclusive. The complaint is that no one can even get a chance of making himself agreeable to you."

"Let them complain. My exclusiveness must have, at all events, the charm of novelty to them."

"I'm not the one to find fault with it," said Valera. "And when is the new wig to be worn, Leona?"

"To-night. Won't you come and see its *début?*"

"I will if I can. Who plays with you?"

"De Brassey, as usual. What a stick that woman is. By the way, you *must* come, Tobal, for I have to fight a duel for her, and it will remind you of old times to see me handling a pistol."

"Don't speak of those old times, I implore you. I shudder when I recall them."

"What a goose you are. It gave me a fright at the moment, but I have quite got over it now. I often think of poor Guzman, though, and wonder if my shot left any permanent effect on him."

"Your eyes would have wounded him far more deeply had he known who you were. I sometimes fancied he had half a suspicion."

"There you are, off on your hobby-horse again," cried Leona. "A man cannot look at a woman with interest, but you think he must

be in love with her! You must be over head and ears in love yourself with somebody or other, or your mind could not be forever running on the same subject."

"You have heard the rumour, I suppose, about me and the second Miss Halliday?"

"No; what is it?" said the girl, sharply.

"New York is quite certain that since Mr. Halliday has been kind enough to admit me to his Sunday evening gatherings, he is desirous I should become more nearly connected with his family. And the link to unite us is said to be Miss Amy Halliday."

"What! that red-haired little animal!"

"Her hair is not red, Leona. It is a very pretty colour—a few shades lighter than your own."

"Please not to make any comparisons between us. The girl is as freckled as a toad."

"Is she freckled?" demanded Valera, absently.

"Oh! of course, *you* can't see it. That is but natural. Love is blind, as all the world knows."

"My dear Leona, you do not imagine for a moment there is any truth in the report?"

"Well, I should rather hope *not!* I never thought *much* of your taste, Christal, but I should give you up altogether if you stooped to admire Miss Amy Halliday. Not that they wouldn't be glad to get you for her. I have no doubt of that, though you *are* only a corresponding clerk. Mr. Halliday has it in his power to make you almost anything he chooses, and the girl has hung on hand long enough, Heaven knows! She must be six-and-twenty if she's a day."

"She is just my own age," replied Valera.

"Oh! you have taken the trouble to ascertain *that*, have you? Saints defend us! I had no idea matters had gone so far. Well,

I wish you joy, Christobal, I wish you joy!" continued Leona, in a heated, fluttered manner. "It will be an excellent match for you, and if a man *must* make a fool of himself he may as well do it by marriage as any other way."

"Leona!—*m'amie!* Have I not told you it is merely a report?"

"It signifies nothing to me if it is a report, or no."

"But it is everything to me! How do you suppose for a minute I *could* love Miss Halliday?"

"Oh! men can love anything with what *they* call love."

"But you have always known, I have always told you——"

"Christal, I don't want any explanations! If it will further your interests to marry that woman—or any other woman—marry her! I shall think you're a fool, but that is of no

consequence. You will have plenty of companions in folly! Men marry every day, and repent every day into the bargain. Only —only——"

"Only what, Leona?"

"*I shall lose my brother, that's all,*" replied the girl in a low voice.

Valera sprung to her side, and threw one arm round her waist.

"*Never!* my dearest! you will never lose your brother, come what may. I would rather be your friend, Leona, than the husband of any other woman in the world."

At this assertion, vehemently given, the golden eyes that had just become to look suspiciously soft and humid twinkled with mirth again.

"Ah! you'll never be both at once, Tobal. My friend must be free to be my friend. I will wrong no one by robbing her of her lover."

"I never mean to be the lover of any but yourself, my darling."

Leona turned and took his handsome face between her hands, and looked into his eyes and laughed.

"Chut, chut! little Spanish goose. Don't waste time crying for the moon, for she will never come down to you. But I like my brother Tobalito better than I do any man, and I will be his friend forever, and forever, and forever. So!"

She kissed him on the brow and eyes and mouth, slapped his cheeks each side lightly with her open hand, and humming a tune, applied herself once more to the contemplation of her head-dress.

Such little scenes were constantly taking place between them, and after each Valera felt that he was no farther off and no nearer to Leona than he had been in the wilds of Brazil. Only, whilst she declined a warmer

affection from him herself, she evinced a very strong disinclination to his becoming intimate with any other woman.

That evening she looked out eagerly for him as she emerged from her dressing-room at the theatre, but he was nowhere to be seen. She was conscious that the powdered *queue* and the primrose satin knee-breeches embroidered in gold much became her; and although she somewhat dreaded his animadversions on her costume, she knew he could not fail to admire her in it; and somehow—she had so few intimate friends in New York—no applause seemed worth much to Leona unless Valera echoed it. So she stood in her gorgeous attire at the open dressing-room door, watching anxiously all who came behind the scenes, but there was no appearance of her adopted brother. A stranger came by presently, at sight of whom she slightly withdrew, for the purpose of letting him pass.

But instead of passing he stopped short, and gazed at the splendid apparition she presented, as though unable to believe his eyes. Leona recognised him then, and, starting back, was about to close her sanctum; but it was too late.

"*Is* it? *can* it be? Yes! surely it *is* my beautiful little Brazilian!" cried the stranger, as he held out his hand. "And it's you alone I've come this very evening to see. Don't you remember me, my dear? John Rouse, who offered you an engagement in Boston, which you wouldn't take after all, you little baggage, all along of that Spanish fellow with the big black eyes. And now I suppose you've forgotten me?"

"Oh no, monsieur," replied Leona, but with a kind of troubled, uneasy manner, that was very unlike her usual nonchalance. "I have not forgotten you, and I was very grateful for your offer. Only I wanted to come here instead."

"Yes, yes; I understand. It was all that Spanish fellow. And where is he now? You've quarrelled with him long ago, I bet, and got another by this time, or perhaps half-a-dozen, eh? By George! I shouldn't wonder at your breaking the hearts of the whole city in that dress. And so Burrage has got you, has he? Well, I hate Burrage for it, my dear, that's all. I made the first offer, and you ought to have belonged to me. However, I won't bear malice. I wish you every success, and I shall go round to the front and watch your play all through."

"You are very good, monsieur. I am afraid my dress is the best part of me, though."

"Burrage doesn't think so. He's very well pleased with your progress, and says you've got the right stuff in you. Well, don't forget Boston when you want another engagement. I've set my little theatre going nicely there, but I haven't got a woman like you on

the boards. However, I shall see you again, my dear, before I go. Ta-ta."

And Mr. John Rouse walked off to ensconce himself in the stage-box, and await the rising of the curtain.

Leona's heart beat fast. She tried to reason herself out of such folly by contemplating the simple fact Valera had tried to impress upon her mind, that no one could carry her off to Boston against her will, or force her into any closer connection with Mr. John Rouse than her inclination pointed to. Yet she felt restless and uneasy by his very presence. A presentiment of evil seemed to come over her, and make her believe she should never be happy till she had heard he had left the city again.

She knew the reason of her alarm, but she knew also that it was perfectly inadequate to the alarm itself. Yet the palpitation her interview with the Boston manager had caused,

rendered her so nervous and unlike herself, that she felt she played worse that evening than she had ever done before. The wonderful exactitude with which she mimicked the gait, gestures, and expressions of the other sex, had been the marvel of New York, and the means of her being constantly brought before the public in the character of men and boys. It seemed much more natural to Leona to play a man's part than a woman's; indeed, her own character was almost too strongly marked to enable her to assume the latter winningly and softly enough to be pleasant on the stage. She could portray the passions of jealousy, revenge, or hatred to the life, and as a murderess she was perfection; but the loving, submissive, tender female characters had to be entrusted to girls, with not a tithe of her real deep womanly feeling, because they *looked* so much what they ought to have been. But though Leona, between her un-

easiness at missing Valera, and her annoyance at having met Mr. Rouse, fancied she was not doing herself justice as the Chevalier de Poigny, and that that unfortunate lover breathed out slaughter against his traducers in a style not wholly accordant with his undaunted courage, the Boston manager was evidently not of the same opinion. He left the box after the first scene, and came behind, teeming with congratulations and compliments.

"I knew you'd make an actress! I told your Spanish friend so the first time I saw you. Mdlle. d'Acosta, permit me to shake you by the hand. You ought to be proud, mademoiselle; you have made a great success. I never saw a man's part better filled by a woman. You will rival the great Dejazet herself."

"I am on again, almost directly," said Leona, only anxious to get away from her officious admirer.

"The next is the garden scene, where I fight a duel, and I have to be concealed behind the bushes during the opening dialogue. I am afraid I must go. Hadn't you better cross to your box, monsieur? The next set of scenery almost closes the wings."

"Ah, well, I've just caught sight of Burrage, I must speak to him first, and then I'll find my way back as best I can. You'll make your fortune yet, my dear. My prophecy will be justified. See if it isn't."

She shrunk from him slightly, as he patted her on the shoulder, and went at once to take up her place at the wings. As she stood behind the painted bushes where she had (as she told Rouse) to wait during the opening dialogue, she found the scenery blocked her exit at that side.

"There's no exit here," she remarked to one of the scene-shifters. "Can't you move that tree?"

"Not very well, miss. The groove's broken. Do you come off this side?"

"No; left."

"We may leave it, then?"

"Oh yes; you may as well, if there's to be any trouble. Move the bush a little forward so as to give me full shelter. That'll do. Thanks."

She was now caged, as it were, with no means of escaping until the scene was over. One piece of scenery leaning against the other blocked all egress. She could do nothing but stand there until she heard the cue for her entrance.

The curtain rose upon the garden scene. The characters concerned in the opening were assembled on the stage. Leona prepared herself for a term of waiting. It was irksome, but she had preferred it to going behind and running the risk of another encounter with the Boston manager. But as she stood there,

voices in conversation broke upon her ear. They proceeded from behind the painted canvas that formed the background of the stage, and were distinct to her although inaudible in front. At the first word that reached her she started, for they were the voices of Mr. Burrage and Mr. Rouse that spoke, and the subject of their conversation was herself.

CHAPTER X.

LEONA'S OATH.

"SHE has been a great success here," said Mr. Benjamin Burrage, "and she'll be a greater success still if she goes on as she has begun. She has a genuine love for the art, sir, and I like to see that in my company. I engaged her at first for nothing on earth but her beauty, but I soon saw what she was made of, and her progress during twelve months is wonderful. Her part to-night is a real difficult one, and wants lots of acting. She's the cleverest male impersonator I've ever seen, and makes an uncommon pretty fellow from the front."

"That she does. I've been thirsting for your blood all the evening, Burrage. I con-

sider she ought to belong to me, for I made her the first offer of an engagement."

"Why didn't she take it?"

"Can't tell you. She was travelling in company with a young Spaniard then, whom she called her brother."

"I know him—Valera. He *is* her brother, or half-brother, or something."

"Well, my opinion is, he's '*something.*' At all events, after having accepted my terms most readily, the girl suddenly changed her mind, and refused to sign the agreement; and the brother (or whatever he is) said it was the separation from him she objected to."

("I'll be revenged on Tobal for this!" thought Leona, who was listening to every word the men spoke. "What does he mean by making inferences that damage my reputation. *Object to be separated from him,* forsooth! By St. Jago! monsieur thinks enough of himself.")

"Very likely," said Burrage, in reply. "They are always together, and I'm very glad the fair d'Acosta wouldn't leave him, my good fellow, however much I may sympathise with your disappointment."

"A manager's sympathy for the losses of his fellow-manager!" replied Rouse, laughing. "I could put all that in my eye and see none the worse for it. But I tell you why I don't believe Valera is any relation to that girl. Because she is not Spanish!"

"She's Brazilian."

"Well, that's not Spanish, though I'm not quite prepared to believe that either. At least, she has Brazilian blood in her, but it's mixed with European. You never saw a pure Brazilian with chestnut-coloured hair."

"Don't know that I have, now you come to speak of it," said Burrage, indifferently.

"She is of European build, too, and complexion. The Brazilian blood comes out in her

eyes and disposition more than in anything else. She reminds me powerfully of one of my old Liverpool friends. I can hardly disconnect her from him in my thoughts."

"Why, who's that?"

"One of the Evans, of the great Liverpool firm, you know."

"Never heard of them."

"Never heard of the firm of Evans and Troubridge at Liverpool! My dear fellow, you must be joking. They're largely connected with the West India trade."

"But what have they to do with d'Acosta?"

(At this juncture of the conversation Leona was in danger of missing her cue. Each sense in her body appeared to have frozen except the sense of hearing. She stood bolt-upright against the canvas scenery, straining her ears that she might not lose a single syllable, whilst her heart seemed paralysed with fear of what might be coming).

"Well, nothing, I suppose, except that her expression reminds me of the elder son. Don't you remember the fuss that took place some five-and-twenty years ago about a murder that was committed in Liverpool on a merchant's clerk, and the man that did it could never be traced?"

"I do, now you remind me of it. Wasn't the man that was murdered called Abraham Anson?"

"Exactly so; and a friend of mine, called George, was supposed to be the murderer."

"Nice sort of friends you had in those days."

"No; but listen. There were two brothers, George and Henry, and I had known them from boyhood. The head of the firm was their uncle, old Theophilus Evans, and he had a confidential clerk that had been with him for years, called Anson. At the time the murder took place, George, the elder nephew, was only

about two-and-twenty, and the uncle openly gave out that the property was to be divided between the brothers. Well, George *was* wild, there's no doubt about that. He was a fine, handsome fellow, always getting into a scrape over cards, or women, or some such rubbish, and Anson used to help him out of them. He was awfully fond of George, was old Anson. That's why I never could quite believe George did it."

"What, cut his throat?"

"Not exactly; but the poor man was killed through violence. He used to sleep on the premises, and one morning, it was the month of June—I remember it as if it had happened yesterday—the till was found to have been broken open and robbed, and the clerk murdered. There was an awful stir about it at the time."

"But why did the suspicion fall upon the nephew?"

"Because he bolted! He was never seen afterwards, and witnesses were found to prove he and Anson had had high words the night before over some money George wanted to borrow, and the other wouldn't, or couldn't lend. So I'm afraid there is little doubt who did it."

"*Never seen afterwards!* That's queer!"

"Never! They had the police out in every direction, but it is one of those few cases in which they were completely baffled. How the fellow got off scot-free beats me entirely."

"Perhaps he was murdered too."

"It must be one or the other. Either George murdered Anson, or he shared his fate."

"What do they think in Liverpool?"

"They have no doubt whatever of his guilt. Long ago as it happened, the story is quite fresh in Liverpool still, and anyone

will tell it you. It killed the old uncle. He died about six months afterwards, leaving all his fortune to the younger brother, Henry. *He's* rich, if you like."

"Going on with the firm?"

"Oh! I believe you, and got a corresponding house in London, where he lives himself. They do enormous business. I generally see him when I cross the duck-pond."

"Married?"

"Yes; but only got one sickly daughter to inherit all his wealth. By jingo! what that fellow George missed by making that awful mistake. He'd have been one of the wealthiest men in London by this time."

"You believe he committed the murder then?"

"No, sir, I don't," exclaimed Mr. Rouse, emphatically. "I *can't* believe it of him; but he might just as well have done it, as far as this world goes, for you'll never convince it

that he didn't. No, no! I believe he's dead, poor fellow! Dead and buried; and I hope he may be with all my heart, for I should be sorry to credit so much ill of him."

"Mr. Burrage, sir," exclaimed the stage-manager, rushing upon them with a frightened look. "We don't know what on earth to do with d'Acosta. She's fainted or something behind the wings, and she ought to be on. Shall we bring the curtain down?"

"Confound it, what's the matter?" cried Mr. Burrage, as he heard the news. "Where's her exit?"

"It's blocked; she ordered it to be left so. We can't get at it, except from the front, and they say she's insensible!"

"Bring down the curtain at once," roared the manager, excitedly. "What the deuce can have happened to cause this? Stay, I must go on in front and make an apology."

And in another moment, breathless and

heated, Mr. Burrage might have been heard stammering out to the people in front:

"Ladiés and gentlemen, it is with regret I have to inform you that a sudden indisposition on the part of Mdlle. Elena d'Acosta compels us to drop the curtain, but if you will accord us your patience for a few minutes, we trust to be able to raise it again, and proceed with the play."

His speech was received with much clapping of hands, but he hardly stayed long enough to acknowledge it with a bow, before he rushed to the assistance of Leona. He found her laid in the centre of the stage, to all appearance lifeless, whilst the other women were loosening her dress and pouring water on her face, and otherwise much interfering with the attempts which nature was making to enable her to regain her consciousness.

At last she opened her eyes, with a sleepy, languid expression, and let them rove slowly

round the circle. As they fell upon the figures of Mr. Burrage and Mr. Rouse, the frightened, scared look that came into them was apparent to all, and, with a violent effort, Leona staggered to her feet, as though, then and there, she was about to rush off the stage.

"Stop, my dear! You are not strong enough to walk by yourself, yet," said Mr. Burrage, kindly.

"But where am I? What have I been doing? Why doesn't the play go on?" she inquired, hurriedly, and then perceiving the state of her costume, and of the stage, she continued, "Oh! have I been ill? How stupid of me! What will Mr. Burrage say?"

"Mr. Burrage says nothing, my dear," said that gentleman, answering for himself, "except that the curtain shan't go up again till you feel better. It's the heat and standing so long that's been too much for you."

"But I *am* better, thank you. Do let the

curtain go up. Do go on at once! I am all right again now. I am quite able to do my work."

"Drink this," said Mr. Rouse, who had been employed in procuring her a stimulant. "This will fetch you up, my dear, in no time."

She shrunk from the glass he tendered her as if it had been poison, and clung to Burrage's arm.

"You *must* take it," said the latter. "It'll do you good, and then go to your dressing-room and arrange yourself, and we'll stop that infernal orchestra and have the curtain up again."

"You aren't fit to go through with it," whispered a sympathising female, who accompanied her to her room.

"I *will* go through with it," was Leona's reply, as she set her teeth together and nerved herself for the coming trial.

Her reappearance on the stage was hailed by the acclamation of the whole house; and every fresh point met with fresh applause which enabled the young actress to keep up until the end. But as the play concluded, all her artificial power faded. She had not even strength enough to appear before the curtain in answer to the many calls upon her name; and Mr. Burrage had again to apologise for her defalcation. All she could do was to murmur, "Do get me a car and let me go home;" and refusing the company of any of her friends, she took her departure to her own rooms alone.

* * * * *

But it was not to take the rest she so much required after her sudden illness.

Hours and hours after the theatre had closed, and all the members of the household had gone to sleep, Leona sat in her room, pondering over what she had heard Rouse say to Burrage. Her memory, which fainting had

somewhat blurred, became distinct and clear again, and she could recall each word that had passed between them with painful accuracy. That great and awful fear, which had never slept since the finding of the letter and the ring, though she had tried with all the strength of her loving faith to her father's memory to stamp it out—oppressed her mind almost to madness. What was it that Rouse had said: *That either George Evans had murdered Abraham Anson or shared his fate!* She knew—George Evans's daughter knew—that he had not shared the clerk's fate. What then? what then? Was she to believe her father a murderer, against his own dying protestations of innocence, just because Mr. Rouse thought it must be so?

Who was Mr. Rouse that he should constitute himself a judge of her dear father's actions?

Yet if he were innocent why had he left

England to make his home in a foreign land under a disguised name? Why had he renounced the expectation of a large fortune to live an impoverished life in Rio Janeiro? Why was he so shy of his fellow-creatures? Why did he call himself Louis Lacoste? Why could he never be persuaded to move out of the stupid little town in which he had fixed his residence, or to visit any larger, more public place, even for a few hours? Why did the threats of that wretch Ribeiro have the power to make the unhappy man cut short the thread of his own existence, sooner than run the risk of their being put into execution?

As these questions presented themselves one after another to the mind of the poor child, she laid her head down on the table and groaned.

They made up a startling array of evidence against her father. There was no doubt of that. A disinterested judge would at once

have given it against him. But his daughter was not disinterested. He had been the one great love of her life whilst his lasted; and now she loved his memory with her whole soul. She would not—she could not—believe him guilty, although the facts of his guilt seemed too clear for any filial love to overcome. But whenever Leona tried to put her affection out of sight, and reason impartially upon the matter, the remembrance of the love that had existed between them—of the timid, retired, suffering life he had led—of the silver hair prematurely whitened by secret fear and sorrow, rose up to provoke all her womanly pity for the weak and oppressed—all her womanly resentment against the oppressor; and she argued (as loving women will) in favour of the object of her devotion against all the clearer, higher, and wiser instincts of her nature. It is not because women are ungifted with reasoning powers that they

will not reason. In nine cases out of ten they are quite as well aware as the other sex on which side is right.

And in the very fact that they *do* know, lies hid the motive of their ranging their forces on the other. It is a common saying that a woman invariably takes the weaker side, and the weaker is usually the wrong side—for Right is Power.

But they do it from generosity—mistaken, perhaps, but still lovable. Women would cease to be women had they not a few weak points about them.

"What! all on one side?" they cry. "The whole world pitted against *one*. What a shame!" And over they go to try what their tender arms can effect in keeping off the enemy.

And this is what troubled Leona so greatly.

In her case, so awful a result hung upon

the crumbling of her faith, that it is not to be wondered at if she would have bitten out her tongue sooner than confess she was mistaken. Every time a doubt intruded itself upon her mind, her father's last words—his dying words, as he knew them to be—rose up to battle with the half-conviction, and overthrow it.

"*If, in years to come, they should ever tell you that your father committed great crimes, don't believe them. I have led a thoughtless and dissipated life, but not a criminal one.*"

Each look on his poor worn face—each tone of his suffering, humbled voice, came back to her with the memory of those words. What was to her the opinion of the whole world compared to the half confession which the anticipation of death had wrung from the father she had loved.

"*Don't believe anything they say against me, Leona; your father is true, remember that! Foolish, but true.*"

She *would* believe it. No power on earth should shake her trust again in the complete innocence of the dear parent whose worst crime lay in his weakness. She had been frightened out of that perfect trust. The finding of the letter and the ring after his death had shaken it. But Mr. Rouse's story had thrown a new light upon them. Had he not said that Abraham Anson had always been extremely fond of her father; and what more natural then, that he should have given him the ring as a keepsake. The letter proved the intimacy that must have existed between them.

Leona felt that had she known these facts when she first read that letter it would not have made her so miserable. She drew it from the safe repository where she had always kept it under lock and key, and unfolding its worn and yellow paper, perused its contents anew.

It was dated the 8th of June, five-and twenty years before, and bore no address:

"DEAR MASTER GEORGE,

"I was sorry to miss you when you called at office yesterday, but the woman says she explained to you that I had been sent for up to the house. The chief mentioned your name. I'm sorry to say he's heard about that business with the Levitt's girl, and wanted me to give him particulars. I pretended to know nothing of the affair, but it appears old Levitt has been up to the house, so I'd get away for a short time, Master George, if I was you. I don't want to have to say anything, so I hope the chief won't put me on my oath; but I think the matter might be settled by money. Levitt's very close-fisted, and I shouldn't wonder if that's all he cares about.

"I am sorry to read the last part of your

letter, especially as it seems so urgent. Is there no other way out, Master George? I'd do it for you directly, and welcome, if it was in my power, and that you must know. But if I try and bleed the chief again just now, it will bring the Levitt affair right about your ears. I'm sure you'll excuse me saying you're rather hot at times, Master George, and I'm afraid it would be risky for you and the chief to meet just now. I wish you could go away for a bit.

"I shall be at home this evening if you'd like to step up and talk it over. But don't ask me for the money, for I haven't got it—nor can I get it either. Come as late as you can, for fear of interruption. Master Henry might drop in, he said; and I know he carries tales of us to the chief sometimes. The chief himself was very crusty to-day, and when I asked for a little advance, grumbled at my poor cornelian ring, and said if I was in want

of money I had no right to wear jewellery. I have more to tell you when we meet.

"Your obedient servant,

"ABRAHAM ANSON.

"P.S.—I forgot to send you my grateful thanks for your kind remembrance of little Lucy. Never mind about the other loan just now, Master George. I don't like to hear you talk about being desperate."

* * * * *

The Eighth of June. And the morning on which the murder had been discovered was the 9th. She had heard Rouse say so. This letter had been written on the previous day, asking her father to go late and meet Anson at the office, where, the next morning, he had been found *dead*. And then her father had disappeared, and witnesses had been brought forward to prove that he and the clerk had had high words together the night before—the

very night on which Anson had invited him to come—high words about money, which the one wanted to borrow, and the other wouldn't, or couldn't, lend. How the facts she had heard, and the facts she saw written, fitted into and tallied with each other. How her heart sickened as she watched the pieces of the puzzle accommodate themselves to one another with the greatest ease. How her brain whirled in its endeavour to separate truth from falsehood, and to account by some plausible reason for her father's disappearance, and the clerk's death; or at all events to do away with the various circumstances that so mysteriously bound them together. But everything seemed against her. Even the mention of the cornelian ring appeared written on purpose to divest her mind of the fond idea that it had been given by Abraham Anson to her father! It was hardly likely the clerk had had two cornelian rings,

and this one, which on the last day of his life he mentions as wearing, had his initials, A. A., scratched on the inside of the setting. Who was this "Levitt girl" too, of whom Anson evidently knew so much? Had her father promised her marriage and failed to keep his word, that "Old Levitt" (as the letter termed him) had "gone up to the house" about it? Oh! what was it all about? What was the mystery? How should she ever unravel it, and clear her poor father's name from the disgrace and contumely that had fallen upon it!

At this juncture Leona's long-tried courage failed, and laying her head down upon her outstretched arms, she wept bitterly. It was an awful trial of her fortitude. She believed, and she did not believe. She believed her dying father's word, but the crushing facts that had been unfolded to her opposed themselves to her faith like blocks of granite hurled against a beautiful flower! The blossom has

all the life, the perfume, and the freshness, but it cannot live beneath the weight of solid stone. But as the girl wept for her inability to confront and overcome the verdict of the world, a great resolution took possession of her soul. So confident was she that, had her father been guilty of the awful crime imputed to him, he would not have had the courage to say those last words to her, that she felt convinced that it was to *her*, his child, who had the missing link of his existence, that the Creator had deputed the task of clearing his name from obloquy and shame. The people in England might believe him to have been the murderer, because they knew nothing of his subsequent life—but she, who had heard both sides of the question, was the person of all others best fitted to unravel the mystery to the very end.

And she would pledge her life to the performance of so sacred a duty. As Leona came

to this decision she rose from her seat, looking more grand and beautiful in her solitude than she had ever done before a crowd, and raising her eyes and hands to heaven, called on the Almighty to register her oath, and reward her according as she fulfilled it.

She knew she would have to work in the dark. She hardly knew yet how she must work, or when the opportunity to commence would arise. But she felt that her oath wa binding. She knew her decision to be irrevocable; and, worn out in mind and body, found further exertion for that night to be impossible to her. So she flung herself upon her bed as carelessly as might be, and strove to forget the turmoil of her mind in sleep.

END OF VOL. I.

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